READY MONEY MORTIBOY

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STRAND.

READY-MONEY MORTIBOY.

A Matter-of-Fact Story.

(REPRINTED FROM "ONCE A WEEK.")

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

WITH INITIAL DESIGNS BY F. W. WADDY.

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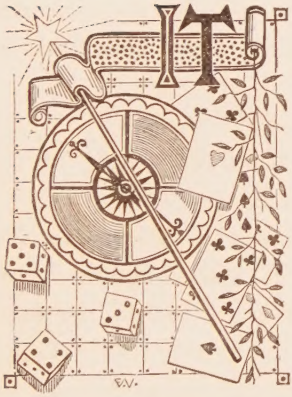
READY-MONEY MORTIBOY.

A MATTER-OF-FACT STORY.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.



IT WAS about this time Mr. Mortiboy took to sending for his lawyer three or four times a week. After each interview he would be more nervous, more shaken than before. He kept the reason of these visits a secret—even from Ghrimes. But to Lucy Heathcote—with whom he spoke more frankly of himself than

to any other human being—the old man told some of his perplexities.

"I am getting old, my dear, and I am getting shaky. I've a deal to trouble and worry me."

"But there is Cousin Dick, uncle."

"Yes, there's Dick. But it is all my property that's on my mind. I always intended to do something for you two, my dear—always."

"Never mind that now, uncle."

"And perhaps I ought for the young Mellishipps as well; though why for them I don't know. And I'm ill, Lucy. Sometimes I think I am going to die. And—and—I try to read—the—Bible at night, my dear; but it's no use—it's no use. All the property is on my mind, and I can think of nothing else."

"Shall I read to you, uncle?"

"No, child!—nonsense!—certainly not," he replied, angrily. "I'm not a Pauper."

Being "read to," whether you liked it or not, suggested the condition of such helpless impecuniosity, that he turned quite red in the face, and gasped. His breath was getting rather short.

Presently he went on complaining again.

"At night I see coffins, and dream of funerals and suicides. It's a dreadful thing to have a funeral going on all night long. I think, my dear,

if I had the property off my mind, I should be better. If it was safe, and in good hands, I should be very much easier. If it was still growing, I should be lighter in my mind. Dick is very good. He sits with me every evening. But he can't be with me when I am asleep, you know, Lucy: and these dreams haunt me."

The old man passed his hand across his brow, and sighed heavily. He could not bear even to think of death; and here was death staring him in the face every night.

"I know I ought to make a will," he went on to his patient listener, Lucy, who did not repeat things—as the old man knew very well. "I ought to; but I can't, my dear. There's such a lot of money, and so many people; and after one is gone, one will be abused for not doing what was right; and—and—I haven't the heart to divide it, my dear. It's such a shame to cut Property up, and split it into pieces."

"Can't you take advice, uncle?"

"I don't trust to anybody, Lucy. They're all thinking of themselves—all of them." This, as if he had been himself the most disinterested of mankind.

"There's Mr. Ghrimes. You trust him, uncle?"

"Well—yes—I trust him. But then he's well paid for it, you see."

Ghrimes got £200 a-year for his work, which a London employer would have considered cheap at five times that sum.

"And you trust Cousin Dick."

"Yes," said the old man, brightening up a little. "I do trust Dick. I trust my boy. He is a great comfort to me—a great comfort. He is very clever —Dick is—he has a wonderful head for business. He manages everything well. Look what a window he got from London for your poor Aunt Susan's memorial—and for twenty pounds. Oh, Dick does everything well, and he's a great comfort to me. But it is not only the division of the Property, Lucy —think of the Awful Probate duty! There's a waste of money—there's a sacrifice: a most iniquitous tax, a tax upon prudence! I'm not so well off as I ought to be, my dear—not so well as my poor father thought I should be; but I've done pretty well. And the probate duty is a terrible thing to think of—it's really appalling. Two per cent. on money left to your son! Thousands will be lost! Dear me! dear me! Thousands!"

These confidences were for Lucy Heathcote alone, with whom the old man felt himself safe.

No talk of property to Dick; no confessions to his son; no asking of advice; no offers of money. So far from giving or lending, Mr. Mortiboy received from Dick, every Saturday morning, a sovereign in payment for a week's board, and two shillings and threepence for a bottle of gin. While pocketing the money, the parent never failed to remind his son of the cheapness of his board, and the fact that he was charged nothing at all for bed and lodging. He always added, solemnly, that it gave him great pleasure to entertain his son, even at a loss.

As for their evenings together, they were always alike. A single candle lighted the kitchen where they sat: the father in a Windsor arm-chair, with his bottle of gin at his elbow, and a long pipe in his mouth; the son opposite him, with a short pipe and another bottle. Between them a deal table. As Dick grew tired of telling stories, he used sometimes to beguile the hours by showing his father tricks with the cards. Mr. Mortiboy, senior, did not approve of games of chance. They gave no opening for the prudent employment of capital, and risked Property. Nor did he approve of so-called games of skill, such as whist; because the element of chance entered so largely into them,

that, as he argued, not the richest man was safe. But his admiration was excessive when Dick —feigning, for the sake of effect, that his father was a credulous and simple-minded person— showed how thousands might be won by the turning up of a certain card; telling which card had been touched; making cards hide themselves in pockets, and drawers, and so forth. These feats of skill, with the stories which, like a child, he loved to hear over and over again, rekindled and inflamed Mr. Mortiboy's imagination, previously as good as dead, so that his fancy ran riot in dreams of unbounded wealth to be found in distant countries— dreams which Dick could have turned to good use had it not been for the want of nerve which had fallen upon his father after Mr. Mellship's death.

Between eight and nine, the old man, who shows signs of having taken as much gin and water as he can well carry, rises to go to bed. Dick lights his candle, and watches the tall, thin figure of his father — stooping now and bent — climbing the stairs.

He heaves a great sigh of relief, and closes the double doors which connect the kitchen, built out at the back, with the rest of the house.

"What has the old woman got for me?" says

Dick, unlocking a cupboard. "Steak again. Well, where's the gridiron?"

The economical principles on which Mr. Mortiboy's household was conducted generally left his son an exceeding hungry man at nine o'clock; and, by private arrangement with old Hester, materials for supper were always secretly left out for him.

Dick deftly cooks the steak, drinks a pint of stout, and producing a bottle of brandy from the recesses of the cupboard, mixes a glass of grog, and smokes a pipe before going to bed.

"It's infernal hard work," he sighs to himself; "and something ought to come of it—or what the devil shall I do with Lafleur?"

Then came a letter from that gentleman. Bad news, of course; had been to Paris; done capitally with his System for a time. Turn of luck; not enough capital; was cleaned out. Would his partner send him more money, or would he run up to town, and bring him some?

He afterwards explained that the System was working itself out like a mathematical problem, but that he had been beguiled by the beaux yeaux of the Countess de Parabère—in whose house was the play—and weakly allowed her to stand behind

his chair. Dick quite understood the significance of this folly, and forbore to make any remark. Bad luck, indeed, affected his spirits but slightly, and he was too well acquainted with his partner to blame him for those indiscretions which the wisest and strongest of men may fall into.

Out of the thousand pounds they brought to England, only one hundred remained. Lafleur, in three months, had had eight hundred; Polly nearly a hundred; and a hundred remained in the bank. Dick, in this crisis, drew out fifty, and went up to town with it.

Lafleur was in his lodgings in Jermyn-street, sitting at work on his System—an infallible method of breaking the banks. He had a pack of cards, and a paper covered with calculations. Occasionally he tested his figures, and always, as it appeared, with satisfactory results. At present he was without a shilling—having lost the last in an attempt to win a little money at pool, at which he had met with provokingly back luck.

"I have brought you something to carry on with for the present," said Dick, "and we must talk about the future."

Lafleur counted the money, and locked it up.

"Permit me to remind my Dick," he said, in his

softest accents, "that the three months are nearly up."

"I know," replied Dick, gloomily.

"Let us go and dine. You can sleep here to-night, if you like. There is a spare room. And we can have a little game of cards."

They dined: they came back: they had a little game of cards. At midnight, Lafleur turned his chair to the fire, and lighting a cigarette, looked at his friend with an expression of inquiry.

"Après, my Richard."

Dick stood before the fire in silence for a while.

"Look here, Lafleur. Did I ever break a promise?"

"Never, Dick. Truthful James was a fool to you."

"Very, well then. Now, listen to me."

He told how his father was falling into dotage; how he held tighter than ever to his money; how the old man grew every day more fond of him; and how he must, at all hazards, contrive to hold on.

"The property is worth half a million at least, Lafleur. Think of that, man. Think of five hundred thousand pounds—two and a half million dollars—twelve and a half million francs! The old man keeps such a grip upon it that I can touch

nothing. Makes me pay him a pound a-week for my grub. But I *must* hold on. It would be madness to cross or anger him now. You must wait, Lafleur."

"I will wait, certainly. Make your three months six, if you like—or nine, or twelve. Only, how are we to live meantime? Get me some money, Dick—if it is only a few hundreds. Can't you get his signature to a blank cheque? or—or—copy his signature?"

"No—quite impossible. He hardly ever draws a cheque; and Ghrimes would know at once."

"Cannot the respectable Ghrimes be squared. No? Ah! Are there no rents that you can receive?"

"None. Ghrimes has a system, I tell you."

"Is there nothing in the house, Dick?"

Dick started. The man had touched on a secret thought. Something in the house? Yes—there was something. There was the press in his father's bed-room, the keys of which were always in old Ready-money's possession. There were gold cups and silver cups in it; plate of all kinds; jewellery and diamonds; and there was, he knew, at least one bag of gold. Something in the house? He looked fixedly at Lafleur without answering.

Lafleur lighted another cigarette ; and crossing his legs with an easy smile, asked casually—

"Is it money, Dick ?"

Dick's face flushed, and his eyebrows contracted. Somehow, he had got out of sympathy with the old kind of life.

"I don't know for certain. I think there is money. Gold and silver things, diamonds and pearls. No one knows the existence of the bureau but myself. But I will not do it, Lafleur. I cannot do it. The risk is too great."

"Then you shall not do it, my partner. *I* will do it."

He went to his desk, and took out a little bottle which he placed in Dick's hands.

"I suppose," he said, holding it lovingly up to the light, "that you are not ignorant of the admirable and useful properties of morphia. This delightful fluid—which contains no alcohol, like laudanum—will send your aged parent into so profound a slumber, that his son may safely abstract his keys for an hour or so, and give them to me. I should only borrow the gold, for the rest would be dangerous. The risk of the affair, if properly conducted, would be simply nothing. Or, another method, as the cookery books say. Let us get an

impression of the keys in wax. That you can do easily. I know a locksmith—a gentle and amiable German, in Soho—whose only desires are to live blamelessly—and to drink the blood of kings. He will make me a key. You will then, on a certain night, make all arrangements for my getting into the house."

"Is that stuff harmless?"

"Perfectly. I will take some myself to-night, if you like."

"Lafleur, I will have no violence."

"Did you ever see me hurt any one?"

"No, by gad!" cried Dick, with a laugh. "But you've sometimes stood by, and seen me hurt people."

It had indeed been Dick's lot to get all the fighting, though it was hardly delicate to remind his partner of the fact.

"It is true," he said, with a slight flush. "There are many gentlemen in the United States and elsewhere who bear about them the marks of your skill. I will not harm your father, Dick. As for the money, it will be all yours some day, you know. And he can't spend it."

"I don't want to hear arguments about taking it," said Dick. "I want it, and you want it, and

that's enough. But I will not run any risk, if I can help it. Good heavens, man! think of letting half a million slip through your fingers for want of a little patience."

"My dear Dick, I will manage perfectly for you. Make me a plan of the house. Get me a bed, because I am a commercial traveller. Let me have a map of the roads between the station and the house."

"There are two stations. You can arrive at nine-thirty, despatch your business, and take the night train by the other station to Crewe, at eleven-thirty."

"Better and better. Now for the plan."

With pen and paper, Dick proceeded to construct a plan and sketch of his father's house. The bedroom was one of three rooms on the first floor, the other two being empty. At the back of the house was a window opening on the garden. Old Hester slept in a garret at the top; Dick himself in Aunt Susan's room, on the second floor. Neither was likely to hear any little noise below.

"My father never locks his door, in case of fire," said Dick, completing his plans. "All you will have to do is to walk in, and open the press which stands here, where I mark it in black lines. You

cannot make a mistake about the door, because the other rooms are locked. And don't take out a single thing except the money. When shall it be?"

"As soon as we can get the key made."

"Good! I'll administer the morphia, and get the key for an impression. To-day is the first: we had better say in about a fortnight."

"Say this day fortnight, unless you write anything to the contrary—the fifteenth."

The pair, sitting at the table, with pencil and paper, arranged their plans quickly enough. In half an hour, Lafleur put the papers in his pocket, and slapped his partner on the back. Dick, however, was gloomy. He was planning to rob his father the second time, and he remembered that the first had not been lucky. Like all gamblers, he was superstitious.

While his son was preparing to rob him, Mr. Mortiboy, senior, was lying sleepless in his bed, with a new determination in his head keeping him awake.

"I'll do it," he said to himself—"I'll do it. Battiscombe and Ghrimes may say whatever they like, and Lyddy may think what she likes. Dick is the proper person to have my property. He won't waste and squander. He won't be got over

by sharks. He knows how to improve and take care of it. I can trust Dick."

In this world, to be believed in is to be successful; and old Mr. Mortiboy believed in Dick.

"What a son," he said, "to be proud of: what a fine son! Thank God for My Son Dick!"

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

NO need of morphia to get at the keys; for, the very next night, Mr. Mortiboy dropped them out of his pocket as he rose to go to bed. They lay on the chair; and his son, after dutifully escorting his sire to the foot of the stairs, went back, and took an impression of them. The operation took him three minutes and a half; and he then mounted to his father's bedroom, and gave back the bunch.

"A very dangerous thing," said Mr. Mortiboy—"a most dangerous thing: a thing I have never done before. A blessed chance, Dick, that it was you who picked them up. A Providence—quite."

A Providence—perhaps; because dispensations of all sorts happen. It is not fair to lay all the

good things at the feet of Providence, and none of the bad. Dick put his wax impressions in a cough-lozenge box, and sent them to Lafleur, who briefly acknowledged their receipt.

His spirits began to rise again as the time for the exploit approached. He went about the house, surveying it with a critical eye—estimating the probability of Hester hearing anything—wondering if Lafleur would do it cleverly—making calm and careful preparations. He prised out two rails in the front garden at night; because the gate was always locked, and gentlemen do not like to be seen clambering over rails. He placed the ladder in readiness behind the water-butt, where it could easily be found. He rubbed candle-grease on the window, to make it open noiselessly. He put oil into the lock of the press, when his father was at the bank. He ascertained that there was no moon on the fifteenth. He found out from a book on medicine what amount of morphia would send a man to sleep.

"And now," he said to himself, "I can't do any more. The old man shall have his draught. Lafleur shall do the trick. I will remove the ladder, and destroy the evidence; and next day there will be the devil's own row! Ho! ho! ho!"

Dick shook his sides with silent laughter as he thought of his father's rage and despair at having been robbed.

"What if I rush to the rescue? Suppose I hear a noise, run downstairs with nothing on, but a pistol in my hand, fire at Lafleur just as he gets out of window, and rush to my father's assistance! What a funk Lafleur would be in."

But he abandoned the idea, though extremely brilliant, as too dangerous. The report of the pistol might attract a policeman.

It was impossible to tell from his behaviour that anything was in the wind. Careless and jovial by nature, he played his part without any acting. He had little anxiety about the robbery, because things were planned so well. As for misgivings and scruples of conscience, they had vanished. In place of them, he daily had before his eyes the picture of his father tearing his hair at the discovery; his own activity in the work of detection; and the imaginary searching of the house, including his own room, "by particular desire."

After all his experience of life, Dick was still only a boy, with the absence of moral principle which belongs to that time of life, all a boy's mischief, and all his fun. One of the best fellows in

the world if he had his own way—one of the worst if anything came in his way. He was big, handsome, black-bearded. He had a soft and mellow voice. He had gentle ways. He petted children. When he had the power, he helped people in distress. He laughed all day. He sang when he was not laughing. He fraternized with everybody. Men have been canonized for virtues fewer than these.

"I'll do it," said Mr. Mortiboy at night. He repeated it in the morning as he dressed. He stared very hard at Dick during breakfast. He sent for lawyer Battiscombe after breakfast, and repeated it to him.

"I'll do it at once," said the rich man.

"I have dissuaded you to the utmost of my power," said his lawyer. "It is a most irregular thing, Mr. Mortiboy. Think of King Lear."

"Mr. Battiscombe, do not insult my family," old Ready-money cried, in great wrath. "It is thirty years since I saw 'King Lear' at the theatre, but I suppose it isn't much altered now. And may I ask if you mean to compare my son, my son Dick, with those—those—brazen hussies?"

"Well—well—of course not. I say no more.

The instrument, sir, will be ready in a day or two, and you shall sign whenever you please."

"The sooner the better, Battiscombe. Let us be ready on the fifteenth: that is Dick's birthday. He will be three and thirty. Three and thirty! What a beautiful age! Ah! Battiscombe, what a man I was at three and thirty!"

He was, indeed, a man; one who denied himself all but the barest necessaries of life, and was already beginning to break his young wife's heart by neglect and meanness.

This was on the fifth of the month. There yet wanted ten days to the completion of Mr. Mortiboy's design. He spent the interval in constant talk with Dick, who could not understand what it all meant.

"Let us walk in the garden, my son," said his father. "I want to talk to you."

The days were warm and sunny, and the garden had a south aspect. The old man, with his arms behind him, stooping and bent, with his eyes on the ground, paced to and fro on the gravel; while Dick, with his hands in his pockets and a pipe in his mouth, lounged beside him, A strange contrast, not of age only, but of disposition. As the mother, so the son. Dick's light and careless

nature, and his love for spending rather than saving, came from poor Emily Melliship.

"I want to tell you, my boy," said the old man —"because I know you are careful and saving, and have just ideas of Property—how my great estate has been built up: how I have got Money."

He told him. A long story—it took many days to tell—a story of hardness, of mean artifice, of grinding the poor man's face, and taking advantage of the credulous man's weakness; a story which made the son look down upon his father, as he shuffled beside him, with contempt and disgust.

"We're a charming family," Dick said to Lafleur one day—"a delightful family, my partner. I think, on the whole, that Roaring Dick is the best of the whole crew. Damn it all, Lafleur, I'd rather hang about gambling booths in Mexico; I'd rather loaf round a camp in California, and lay by for horses to steal; I'd rather live cheating those who would else cheat you, shooting those who would else shoot you, than live as my respected father and grandfather have lived. Why, man, there isn't an old woman in Market Basing who does not prophesy a bad end to money got in their way, and wonder why the bad end does not come."

"All very well," said Lafleur. "But I should like to have half a million of money."

"Criminals!" growled Dick, pulling his beard. "They'd call me a criminal, I suppose, if they knew everything. Why don't they make laws for other kinds of criminals?"

"My friend," his partner softly sighed, "do not, I implore you, begin your remembrances. Life is short, and ought not to be troubled with a memory at all."

"Perhaps it's as well as it is. By gad, we should all be in Chokee; and the virtuous ones, if there are any, would have an infernally disagreeable time of it, trying and sentencing. I should plead Insufficiency of income, and an Enormous appetite. What should you say?"

On the morning of the fifteenth of May, Dick received a note from Lafleur, informing him of his intention to execute their little design that evening. He twisted up the note and put it in the fire, with a chuckle of considerable enjoyment, thinking of his father's misery when he should find it out.

Mr. Mortiboy was particularly lively that morning. He chattered incessantly, running from one subject to another in a nervous, excited way.

"Be in the house at three to-day, Dick," he said, solemnly. "A most important business is to be transacted, in which you are concerned. Mr. Ghrimes is coming."

"Very odd coincidence," thought Dick. "There's an important business coming off to night at ten, in which *you* are concerned." However, he only nodded, and said he would remember.

He spent his morning in completing the arrangements for the evening, so far as anything remained to be done. Then he went to the bank, as was his custom, and talked with the people who called on business. They all knew him by this time; and, when they had fought out their business with Ghrimes, liked to have ten minutes talk with the great traveller, who dispensed his stories with so liberal a tongue.

At three o'clock, Mr. Ghrimes—punctual and methodical—arrived from the bank, and Mr. Battiscombe, with a blue bag, from his office. Mr. Mortiboy heard them, and led his son by the arm to the state-room—the parlour, which had not been used since the day of the funeral. Once more, as for an occasion of ceremony, the wine and biscuits were set out.

Mr. Mortiboy shook hands with all three, and

stood on the hearth-rug, as he had stood when last they met together in that place. But this time his hand was on his son's shoulder, and his eyes turned from time to time upon him with a senile fondness.

"I am anxious," said Ghrimes, with a red face, "that you"—here he looked at Dick—"should know that I have done my best to dissuade Mr. Mortiboy from this step. I think it foolish and wrong. And I have told him so."

"You have, George Ghrimes—you have," said the old man.

"There is yet time, Mr. Mortiboy," urged his manager.

"Nonsense, nonsense."

Mr. Mortiboy made a sign to the lawyer, who produced a parchment from his bag, and handed it to him.

"George Ghrimes," he began, "when my son Dick was supposed to be dead, John and Lydia Heathcote were my apparent heirs. Between them and their daughters—for, of course, *I* should not have fooled it away in memorial windows, and hospitals, and peacockery—would have been divided all my Property. I can understand their disappointment. But they must also feel for the joy of a father when he receives back a long-lost son—a

son like Dick, rich, prosperous, careful, and with a proper sense of Money. My son Dick has been home for three months. During that time I have watched him, because I do not trust any man hastily. My son Dick has proved all that I could wish, and more. He has saved me hundreds."

"He saved the bank," interrupted Ghrimes.

"He did. He has saved me thousands. He has no vices—none whatever. No careless ways, no prodigality, no desire to destroy what I have been building up. What he is now to me I cannot tell you, my friends—I cannot tell you."

He stopped to hide his emotion. The poor old man was more moved than he had ever been before, even when his wife died. Dick stared at his father in sheer amazement. What on earth was coming next?

"And there is another thing. I am getting old. My nerve is not what it was. If it were not for my son Dick, and—and, yes, I must say that—for Ghrimes, I should be robbed right and left by designing sharks, I should lose all chances of getting money. My Property is too great a burden to me. I cannot bear to see it suffer from my fault. I am going to put it into abler hands than mine. My son Dick shall manage it—it shall be

called his. Dick, my son "—here he fairly burst into tears—"take all—take all—I freely give it you. Be witness, both of you, that I do this thing in a sound state of mind and body, not moved by any desire to evade the law and save money on that Awful probate duty; but solely out of the unbounded confidence I have in my son Dick." He paused again. "And now, my friends, the work of my life is finished. I hope I shall be spared for some few years to see the prosperity of my boy, to mark the growth of the Property, to congratulate him when he gets Money."

Yes—all was Dick's! Old Ready-money had signed a Deed of Gift, passing away all his vast wealth to his son with a few strokes of his pen. The lawyer explained, while Dick was stupefied with astonishment, that he was the sole owner and holder of all the Mortiboy property. As he explained, Mr. Mortiboy sat back in his easy chair, drumming with his fingers on the arm, with a smile of intense satisfaction. Dick held the paper in his hand, and received the congratulations of the lawyer with a feeling that he was in a dream.

They went away. Mr. Mortiboy, left alone with his son, felt awkward and ill at ease. His effusion

spent, and the deed done, he felt a kind of shame —as undemonstrative people always do after they have bared their hearts. He felt cold, too—stripped, as it were.

"It will make no difference, Dick," he said, in a hesitating way.

Dick only nodded.

"We shall be exactly the same as before, Dick."

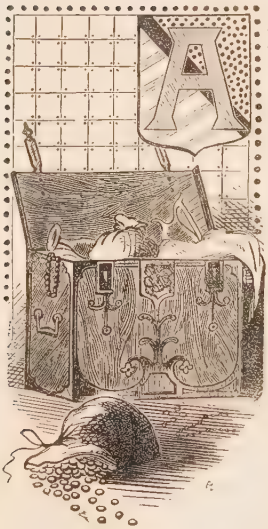
He nodded again.

"I shall go out, father, and recover myself a bit. I feel knocked over by this business."

"Don't lose the deeds, Dick—give them to me to keep."

But Dick had stuffed them in his pockets, and was gone.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.



FTER paying a tribute to his father's extravagant generosity by washing his throat with a wine-glass of Cognac in the pantry on his way out, Dick Mortiboy strode into the garden. He felt the want of light, and space, and air to appreciate his father's act.

In the close parlour, where old Ready-money had in one great gift beggared himself and made his son a millionaire, he could not think.

This rover of the seas went out into the air to realize his position ; and then he did not do it in a moment. What a change a few up-and-down strokes of a pen can make! It seemed impossible. An hour before, Dick Mortiboy would have sworn that he had lived too long in a world of surprises to be surprised by anything. But the sudden transformation of Lafleur's partner into the richest man in Market Basing was almost too much even for his adamantine nerves. The sensation of being respectable was too new. He was a little staggered : strode fast along the gravel paths of the old-fashioned garden—now pale, now slightly flushed —and, intense realist as he was, had a dim notion of something unreal in his great stroke of fortune. This feeling floated across his brain once or twice in the first few seconds only. He felt the stiff parchment crumple in the grasp of his sinewy fingers. This put dreams to flight : here was reality!

He held possession in his hand.

He stood in his father's shoes, he hardly knew how many years before he had expected to put them on.

From the moment he had made up his mind to stay with his father, he had played his cards well. But the end of the game had come almost too soon.

Life thus lost one fertile source of amusement for Dick Mortiboy. And then the old man had outwitted him after all. Closely as he had watched him, he had never dreamed what was in the wind. He had seen the effect Mr. Mellishipp's death had had on his father, and had marked with interested eye the signs of his mental decay. But the idea of Ready-money Mortiboy making a transfer of everything to him had never entered his mind.

The man who would have grudged him a coin gave him his hoards. Yet, in his heart, Dick had not one spark of gratitude towards his father.

"I've had a good many facers in my life," he said to himself, "but this is the most wonderful of any. Twelve years' knocking about ought to make a man equal to most accidents, but I don't suppose that any accident ever happened that could hold a candle to this. Fatherly affection must be a very strong sentiment with some people. I don't feel any such yearning after little Bill as the governor must have had for me. Wonder if he repents his ways, and is trying to make atonement? Can't be that. No, he thinks he has saved the probate duty, and made a nominal transfer to his affectionate, his clever, steady, honest son, Richard, Wonder if he thinks I'm going to let him have his own way?

Can't be such a fool as that. Wonder if he believes all he says? Must. Most extraordinary old chap, the governor! What are we to do now? Shall we live in Market Basing, and 'see the property grow?' I don't think we can. Shall we undeceive the old man?"

His face grew dark.

"He treated me like a dog. He gave me the wages of a porter. He starved me and bullied me. He turned me into the streets with a ten pound note. When I come home and pretend that I am rich, he fawns upon me and licks my hand. 'Honour your father.' Now, I ask an enlightened General Board of Worldly Affairs—if there is such a thing—how the devil I can be expected to honour Mr. Mortiboy, senior? Ready-money Mortiboy, is he? Good. He shall have ready money for the future, and not too much of it. What he gave me, I will give him. I've been a forger, have I? I've been a gambler and an adventurer—I've lived by tricks and cunning for twelve years, have I? I've been a bye-word in towns where men are *not* particular as to their morals, have I? I've done the fighting for Lafleur, and the lying for both of us, have I? I've been Roaring Dick, with my life in my hand, and my pistol in my pocket, sometimes

with a fistful of money, sometimes without a dollar, have I? And whose fault?"

He shook his fist at the house.

"And now I'm master of everything. My affectionate father, your affection comes too late. I am what you made me—an unnatural son."

He was gesticulating a little in his anger, like Lafleur did when he was excited. He had picked up the trick from his partner. And he was speaking out in a loud tone of voice, and shaking his fist at the bottom of the garden, near the old door he had found locked on the Sunday morning when he first met Polly after his return. And the door had a very large keyhole, and there was an eye at it watching him with considerable interest.

Polly was there.

"D-I-C-K," she whispered through the keyhole.

He heard it, swore, and thought the place was haunted. His back was turned to the door.

"Dick," she called again, in a louder tone.

This time he knew the voice, and soon discovered where it came from.

"Good gad—Polly!"

He did not look pleased.

He put his foot on the pump, and looked over. She was dirty, and her clothes were very untidy.

"Dick, what were you going on like that for? I saw you when you were up at the other end of the garden, shaking your fist at your father's bed-room window. What's he been doing of, Dick?"

"What do you want here at this time of the day?" was the only answer she got to her queries.

She did not dare to repeat them. She was afraid of the man's anger.

"Dick," she said, "I want some money. Little Bill's been took bad, and I've got nothing to send him. Scarlet fever he's got."

"Polly, my girl"—he was still on his own side of the wall—"you've had fifty pounds out of me in three months. Bill can't cost all that, you know. You'd better not try on any humbug, because I'm not going to stand it."

"Now, who was? And he's had every farden of it—except a pound or two I kep' for clothes myself. But he wants it, Dick."

"Then *I'll* take it to him."

The woman's expression grew obstinate and stubborn.

"You take me to your father, and say, 'Here's my wife,' and you shall have his address; not before, my fine Dick."

"Then," said Dick, "you may go to the devil!" And marched away.

Polly waited a few minutes, to see if he would come back; and then she too walked off.

The evening was a silent and dismal one. Mr. Mortiboy proposed a bottle of port to drink the occasion. Dick suggested brandy instead; and the old man drank three tumblers of brandy and water. In his excited state, the drink produced no effect upon him; and he went off to bed at half-past nine without the usual symptoms of partial inebriation. Then Dick relapsed into a gloomy meditation by the kitchen fire. He was aroused by the clock striking ten, and leaped to his feet as if he had been shot.

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated—"the very time for Lafleur. I had forgotten all about him."

He kicked off his boots, and crept silently along the passage and up the stairs. A light came through the door of Mr. Mortiboy's bedroom, which was left ajar. He heard the sound of money.

"Cunning old fox," thought Dick; "hiding my money, is he?"

Then he crouched down in the dark passage, and waited.

The situation presently struck him as being intensely comic. Here was the old man counting his money in the bed-room, while Lafleur was probably getting up the ladder. Instead of sleeping off a dose of morphia, Mr. Mortiboy was in a lively state of wakefulness. Instead of robbing the father, Lafleur would be robbing him. He chuckled at the thought, leaning against the wall, till the floor shook.

In five minutes or so, he saw a black form against the window.

"There he is," thought Dick.

The real fun was about to begin.

Lafleur opened the window noiselessly, and stepped into the passage. He moved with silent steps, feeling his way till he came to the old man's door. Then he looked in, and stood still, irresolute —for the light was streaming out, and Mr. Mortiboy was not even in bed.

Dick crept along the passage, and laid a heavy hand upon his shoulder. Lafleur started, but he knew the pressure of that hand : it could only be Dick.

They peeped together through the half-opened

door. Mr. Mortiboy had opened the doors of his great press, and brought out all the contents. They were scattered on the table. Gold and silver plate, forks, spoons, cups, épergnes—all lay piled in a heap. In the centre a great pile of sovereigns, bright and new-looking. The old man stood over them with outstretched arms, as if to confer his blessing. Then he laid his cheek fondly on the gold. Then he dabbled his hands in it, took it up, and dropped the coins through his fingers. Then he polished a gold cup with his sleeve, and murmured—

"Dick knows nothing of this—Dick knows nothing of this."

And then Dick gently led Lafleur away, and brought him silently to the kitchen, where, with both doors shut, he sat down, and laughed till his sides ached.

"Pardon me," said Lafleur, whose face was white with rage and disappointment, "I don't see the joke. Pray, was this designed as a special amusement for me?"

"I must laugh," cried Dick. "It's the finest thing I ever came across."

And he laughed again till the tears ran down his cheeks.

Lafleur sat down doggedly and waited.

"And now," said Dick at last, "let us talk. It's all right, partner, and you can have your five thousand whenever you like."

"Now?" asked Lafleur.

"Well, not now. In a few days. Hang it, man!—you can't get a big lump like that paid down at a moment's warning."

"Tell me all about it."

Dick told him in as few words as possible.

"It is all yours, Dick?"

"All mine."

"You are rich at last. Good." He was considering how he might get his share of the plunder. "Let me have a few hundreds to-night, Dick. I lost a lot yesterday, and promised to pay to-morrow evening."

"How can I? To-morrow I can give you five hundred from the bank, if you like."

"Too late. If it is all yours, the money upstairs is yours. Let me have some of that."

Dick hesitated. Void of affection as he was to his father, he yet felt a touch of compunction at undeceiving him so soon.

"I meant to have an explanation in a few days. But if you cannot wait——"

"I really cannot, my dearest Richard. It is life and death to me. I must start from this respectable place to-night with money in my pocket."

"Then we must have our row to-night. It seems hard that the old man should not have a single night's rest in his delusion. However, it can't be helped. Give me your duplicate keys."

He put on his boots, took a candle, and went upstairs to his father's room. Mr. Mortiboy was in bed by this time and asleep, for the explanation of things had taken nearly an hour. Dick opened the press, took out a couple of bags, such as those used at the bank, containing a hundred pounds each, and threw them with a crash upon the table. The noise woke his father.

He started up with a shriek.

"Thieves!—murder!—Dick!—Dick!—thieves!—Dick!"

"It *is* Dick. Don't be alarmed, father. I am helping myself to a little of my own property. That is all."

The old man gasped, but could not speak. He thought it was another of the dreadful dreams which disturbed his nights' rest.

Dick sat on the edge of his bed, with the candlestick in his hand, and looked him in the face, pull-

his beard meditatively, as he always did when he was going to say a grave thing.

"It is quite as well, father, that we should understand one another. All your property is now mine. I can do what I like with it—consequently, what I like with you. I shall not be hard on you. What you gave me when I was nineteen, I will give you now that you are getting on towards seventy. An old man does not want so much as a boy, so the bargain is a good one for you. A pound a-week shall be paid to you regularly, with your board and lodging, and as much drink as you like to put away. The pound begins to-morrow."

His father put his hand to his forehead, and looked at him curiously. He still half thought it was a nightmare.

"It is not your fault that your estimate of my character was not quite correct, is it? You see, you never gave yourself any trouble to find out what I was like as a young man. That is an excuse for you, and accounts for your being so easily taken in by my stories. I wanted your money, which was natural enough. I knew very well that if I came snivelling home like a beggar, a beggar I should remain. So I came home like a rich man; flourished the little money I had in your face;

bragged about my estates, and my mines, and all the rest of it. Estates and mines were all lies. I've got nothing. I never had anything. I've lived by gambling and my wits. This very night, if it were not for the deed of gift you have made, I should have robbed you, and you would never have found out who did it."

The old man's face was ghastly. Beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead. His eyes stared fixedly at his son, but he made no sign.

"You see, my dodge succeeded. Dodges generally do, if one has the pluck and coolness to carry them through. Now I'm worth half a million of money. No more screwing hard-earned coins out of poor people. No more drudging and grinding for the firm of Mortiboy. The property, sir, shall be spent, used, made the most of—for my own enjoyment."

Still his father neither moved nor spoke.

"I've lived, since you kicked me out into the world, as I could—as a gambler lives. You have told me, in the last few days, how you have lived. Father, *my life has not been so bad as yours.* I've held my own among lawless men, and fought for my own hand, in my own defence. No one curses the name of Roaring Dick—not even the men

whose money I have taken from their pockets; for they would only have done as much by me if they could. But you? In every street, in every house in this town, yours will be a memory of hatred. I never robbed a poor man. You have spent your life in robbing poor men. There, I've had my say, and shall never say it again. As for these things" kicking the door of the press—"they will be all sold. To-night, I only want the money. Go to sleep now, and thank Heaven that you have got a son who will take care of your latter days."

He took his bags, and left the room. His father threw out his arms after him in a gesture of wild despair, and then fell heavily back, without a sigh or a groan.

Lafleur returned to London by the night train, with the money; and Dick went quietly to bed, where he slept like a top.

In the morning, Mr. Mortiboy did not appear at breakfast. Dick sent Hester up. His door was wide open. The press was open, the gold and silver plate lying about on the floor, as Dick had left it. But the late owner of all was lying motionless on the bed. He was stricken with paralysis. His power of speech and of moving were gone; and save for his breathing, you would have called him

dead. Dick, with great thoughtfulness, had him removed downstairs to his old study, where he installed Hester as nurse and attendant, telling her to get another woman for the house. He had all the doctors in the place to attend his father, and expressed, with dry eyes, much sorrow at the hopeless character of the malady. Market Basing was greatly exercised in spirit at the event, which it considered as a "judgment," though no special reason was alleged for the visitation. And all men began to praise Dick's filial piety, and to congratulate Mr. Mortiboy, or rather his memory, on having a son—tali ingenio præditum—gifted with such a remarkable sweetness of disposition, and so singular an affection for his father.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

THE duties of a son being performed, and his father formally placed under the charge of old Hester, Dick put the keys of office in his pocket, and walked over to the bank, where the news of old Ready-money's paralysis had already been received. Ghrimes and the lawyer were the only persons who knew of the deed of gift.

"Don't he look solemn?" asked the old women of each other, as the afflicted son went down the street.

"Such a son as he was, too! Ah, better than old Ready-money deserved."

Ghrimes, in the manager's office, was looking over papers.

"So," said Dick, shaking hands with him, and sitting on the table, "you didn't approve of the deed of gift, eh? Never mind: quite right, and just like you to say so. However, that's all over. You've heard of the old man's stroke, I suppose? Doctor thinks some shock must have accelerated the final break-up. Shock of yesterday, I suppose. He couldn't bear to see the money go."

This was strictly and literally true. Mr. Mortiboy, though from his bed and not from his parlour, could not bear to see the money going.

"However, it's all over now, and things are changed. As for us two, Ghrimes, you have served my father so well that I hope you will go on serving me."

"I desire nothing better."

"Things will be different, I dare say, because I am going to manage matters after another fashion; but we shall pull together; never fear that. I pull with everybody."

"I've been in the bank, man and boy, for sixteen years. I should be sorry to leave it now," said Ghrimes, half to himself.

"Of course you will not leave it. You will go on managing. I'm not going to sit with my hands in my pockets, but I am not a meddler."

"And your estates in Mexico? How shall you manage about them?" asked Ghrimes, in perfect good faith.

"My partner has gone out," replied Dick, with unmoved face, "to superintend them. I shall not trouble about them."

"Indeed, you need not," said his manager, "for there is work enough here for three men. Here, for instance, is a case—one of those cases which your poor father would always decide for himself."

"Well, then, for once I will decide for myself. What is it?"

And here Dick began that course of social reform which has made him immortal in Market Basing.

"It's the case of Tweedy, the builder. What are we to do with him? Your father always declared that he would advance him no more money. His bill is due to-day. He can't meet it, I know."

"Tell me all about him in a few words."

"Furniture dealer — cabinet-maker. Took to building. As fast as he built got into difficulties. Mr. Mortiboy advanced him money: got his houses. Always in difficulties: will smash if we don't prevent it: pays his workmen by discounting small bills at the bank: is getting deeper every day."

"What have we got out of him?"

"About a dozen houses. That villa on the other side of the river in Derngate, among others. All profit, of course."

"That beats California. Send for him, and let us see him."

The man came: a man with a craze for designing and building; born to be an architect, but without an education; might have designed a cathedral, but expended his energies on Gothic villas, which he persuaded himself would make his fortune. Old Mortiboy had been getting money out of him for years.

"So you're Tweedy, are you?" said Dick, looking down at the nervous little man from six feet one to five feet three. "I remember you when you had your shop. Where is it now?"

"I wish I had it now, sir," said the man.

"You *would* try to make your fortune, you know. And you were conceited enough to think you could. And what are you worth now?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Nothing—and a bill of two hundred pounds to meet. Now, Tweedy, suppose you go back to the furniture shop. Don't look scared, man. I'll give you a lift. That little villa that you put up be-

hind Derngate—a good house, is it? very well—I'm going to live in it. Go up to town, and furnish it for me. Furnish it well—well, mind. Pay trade price, and charge yourself a fair profit. Get me good things: no gimcracks. Have everything ready in three days. The bill may stand over. If you don't like this, say so."

The man began a flood of gratitude, which Dick stopped by pushing him out of the door.

"He deserves something for building me a dozen houses for nothing," he said, coolly; "and I must get the place furnished. I made up my mind to live there this morning."

"One of your clerks, I am sorry to say, has embezzled some money. I found it out last night—though he does not know it yet."

"How much is it?"

"Five pounds."

Dick winced. It was the exact amount of his own forgery.

"What is his name, and what is his salary?"

"Sullivan: he draws sixty pounds a-year."

Dick put his head out of the door, and shouted to the office generally—

"Send Sullivan here."

A pale-faced lad of twenty-two, with a weak and

nervous mouth, and a hesitating manner, came in and shut the door, trembling.

"Well, Mr. Sullivan, and how about this five pounds?"

Mr. Sullivan burst into tears.

"The last clerk who embezzled money in this bank," said Mr. Ghrimes, solemnly, "was tried for the offence, and underwent a sentence of imprisonment for it."

"There, you see," said Dick.

Mr. Sullivan sobbed louder.

"You draw sixty pounds a-year: a princely salary," continued his new master. "Do you drink, or play billiards, or what, to get rid of so much money?"

"Nothing, sir."

"My young friend, you had better make a clean breast of it to Mr. Ghrimes and me, or it will certainly be a case of the man in blue and chokee. Now, think for a few minutes, and then answer."

The boy—he seemed little more—sat down, and laid his head in his hands.

"I cannot tell," he moaned. "I cannot tell you both."

Dick's face grew soft. The man who had not hesitated to tell his father the bitter truth, who

had planned to rob him, who was devoid of scruples, or of restraint, or of fear, had yet a heart that could be touched. He could not bear the sight of misery.

"Leave us for two minutes, Ghrimes. Now, my boy, what did you do it for?"

"I had to find five pounds for her; and I borrowed the money."

"Who is *her?* And why did she want five pounds?"

Then the story came out: how he wanted to marry a girl, the daughter of a small tradesman; how he was forbidden to speak to her; how they took secret walks together; how the old, old tale was repeated; how it became necessary for her to leave home, and he had taken the money to help her to go. And then more sobs, and more softening of Dick's heart.

"Go away now," said Dick, "and go on with your work. I am not going to prosecute you. Bring her with you this evening, at nine o'clock, to Derngate."

The delinquent despatched, Dick proceeded to ask for the salaries book. The cheapness with which banking is conducted, as evidenced by the salaries of the clerks, struck him as very remark-

able. Mr. Ghrimes, who managed a business worth many thousands a-year, received the magnificent stipend of £200. The other employés ranged from £120 to £50.

"Banking," said Dick, "seems about the easiest and cheapest way of getting money ever hit upon."

"When you've got your connection, it is," said his manager.

"Would you mind calling in the clerks? Gentlemen, I have no doubt," he said, addressing them in a body, in his best book English, "that my father's intention was to do just exactly what I am about to do. It must often have occurred to him that to ensure zeal, punctuality, and diligence, as well as honesty"—here Sullivan trembled exceedingly—"it is necessary to pay those gentlemen whose services you secure as highly as is compatible with your own interests." Here the clerks nudged each other. "I am now acting as his representative. You used to call him 'Ready-money' Mortiboy. He will still more deserve the title when I inform you that all your salaries are raised twenty-five per cent. from this moment." They all stared at one another. "But if you get into money difficulties, and don't tell me, you'll find yourselves in the wrong box. Now, don't make a row, but go

back to your work"—for the clerks were preparing to make a demonstration of gratitude.

"And Sullivan," said Mr. Ghrimes, "don't let us have any more of that unpunctuality which I reproved you for just now"—for the clerk's eyes were still wet with tears, and his fellows had been questioning him.

"Kindly said, Ghrimes," said Dick. "Now for yourself."

That night Mr. Ghrimes went to bed with his salary trebled, and a cheque for a thousand pounds.

The clerk Sullivan appeared as the clock struck nine at the house in Derngate, accompanied by a young woman. The pair looked very young and very forlorn. Dick opened the door himself, and led them to his own room—that which had been the parlour, where a few alterations had been hastily made to suit his own tastes, previous to his removal.

He made them sit down, and stood with his back to the fire looking at one and the other.

"You are a pretty pair of fools," he said.

The girl began to cry. Her lover had spirit enough to answer for her.

"She is not to blame. I am the only one."

"Do you want to marry him?" asked Dick bluntly of the girl.

She only cried the more.

"Well, then, do *you* want to marry her?"

"I do—of course I do."

"Which would you rather do, my dear—run away with him and be married in London, or be married here and go up to London afterwards on my business?"

"Oh, here—here, Mr. Mortiboy. But they won't let us."

"They will when I have seen your father. And I will see him to-night. Now, have a glass of wine. What is your name, child?"

"Alice."

"Then, Alice, here's a glass of port for you. Sullivan, if you ill-treat your wife, look out for yourself. You will hear from me to-morrow morning. Good-bye, Alice, my dear. Give me a kiss."

He went to the young lady's parent, and had an interview with him; the result of his arguments being that a wedding took place the following week.

Dick improved the occasion with his manager, pointing out to him the folly of putting young fel-

lows in positions of trust without a salary sufficient to keep them from temptation ; and he talked with so much wisdom that Ghrimes began to regard him as the foremost of living philosophers. Certain reflections, in the course of his life, Dick had certainly made. And he now began to act upon them.

In two or three days the furniture arrived, and the house beyond the river was rendered habitable, under the superintendence of Mrs. Heathcote. It was a small place, but big enough for a bachelor. And then, as Mrs. Heathcote observed, it was always easy to move, and of course he was not going to remain a bachelor always. Dick permitted the observation, in the presence of Polly—who had been brought by Mrs. Heathcote to help arrange and set to rights—to pass unanswered.

At first he announced his intention of having no servants in the house at all ; but gave way at the remonstrances of Mrs. Heathcote, who felt here the family respectability was in danger.

"I will send you a nice old woman that I know, Dick," she said—"one that I can recommend."

The nice old woman—who was not nice to look at—came. She had a very bad time indeed, so long as she remained. Dick had given special

orders that she was not on any account to cross the threshold of his smoking-room, an apartment which he intended to keep sacred. He did not lock the door; and on the very first day the old woman, urged on by the fury of feminine curiosity, opened the door. The astute Richard had affixed a cord craftily, one end being attached to the top of the sideboard, and the other to the door. All the glasses and decanters on his sideboard were pulled off and broken. There went three months' wages.

Dick disliked locking things up. The old woman loved strong drinks. On the second day, she drank out of a brandy bottle in which her master had mixed a certain medicine. That night she was very ill.

On the third day she was in his bed-room, where Dick had slung a hammock, as being more comfortable than a regular bed. An open letter lay on the table. She put on her spectacles and began to read it, holding it out, as old people do, between her hands. Dick, who was coming up the stairs—the big man moved noiselessly when he pleased—drew his pistol and fired—at her, she declared. The bullet passed straight through the letter, within an inch of her two thumbs. She dropped the paper,

and fell backwards with a terrific shriek. Spectacles broken this time, too.

After that she resigned, and spread awful reports about the house.

Then Dick was left servantless, and for a day or two used to cook his steaks for dinner himself.

Mrs. Heathcote again came to his assistance.

"I don't know what you've done, Dick, but no woman in the place will come here. If you fire pistols at people, and poison your brandy, and tie ropes round your glasses, how can you expect it?"

"I didn't fire at her. I only frightened her."

"Well, would you like Mary? She wants to leave me—I don't know why. Says she must live nearer her mother. Perhaps she'd come. She's not so old as you might wish; but she's a well-conducted, handy woman, and I really think would make you comfortable."

He hesitated. The plan offered a good many advantages, not the least being that he would not have Polly coming secretly to see him, which was dangerous.

Dick had made a step in civilization. He began to respect people's opinions.

On the other hand, it would be disagreeable to have the woman always in the house. He chose at

last to have a sort of day servant, one who should come with as many attendant ancillæ as might be judged necessary, at eight in the morning, and depart at seven in the evening. He would have no one sleep in the house. And to this decision, irregular and un-English as it appeared to Mrs. Heathcote, he adhered. Polly, however, left the service of Mrs. Heathcote, and came to Market Basing to live with her mother.

Of course, Market Basing could think of nothing but this fearful and wonderful man. What he had done last—what he was likely to do—whom he would visit—were the chief subjects of their conversation at this period. They used to go to Derngate, and walk along the towing-path in hopes of seeing him in the Californian dress which he affected in warm weather. He was to be seen smoking a cigar after breakfast or dinner, in long boots, leather breeches, with a crimson silk cummerbund, an embroidered shirt, a richly braided jacket, and a Panama hat.

If he met any of the girls, he would converse with them without the ceremony of introduction: notably in the case of Lawyer Battiscombe's daughters, who, Mrs. Heathcote said, threw themselves

at his feet. If he fell in with a man who pleased him, he would take him into the villa, and there compound him some strange drink which would make the world for a brief space appear a very Paradise—until presently the magic of the dose departed, and the drinker would be left with hot coppers.

He never went to church, and refused to subscribe to the chapel. To the rector he was polite —offering him, when he called, a glass of a certain curious restorative; and when the worthy clergyman turned the conversation on things ecclesiastical, Dick listened with the apparent reverence of a catechumen.

"What I like in the Church," said Dick, "is the complete equality that reigns in the building. All alike, eh? No difference between rich and poor in the matter of cushions and pews."

The rector felt that he was on delicate ground.

"And as to preaching, now. I suppose you find the people getting a great deal better every year?"

"Well—well—we do our best."

"They used to get drunk on Saturday nights. Do they still?"

The rector was obliged to own that they did.

"Now, rector, let us have a bargain. You shall

preach on any given thing you like for a whole year; and if, after that time, you find the town better, and the—the special sin removed, come down on me for your schools, or anything you like."

The rector hesitated.

"The grocer puts sand in his sugar and mixes his tea; the publican puts 'foots' in his beer; the doctor humbugs us with his pills; the tobacconist waters the bird's-eye; the labourer drinks half his wages; the women are uncleanly and bad-tempered. Come, rector, there's a splendid field for you."

The rector was silent.

"I don't like unpractical things," continued Dick. "There was a township in California, sir, where they thought they ought to have a church. So they built one, and subscribed their dollars, and got a bran-new preacher in black togs from New York. Down he came; and the first Sunday they thought, out of common politeness, they'd give him a turn. He had a regular benefit: house full—not even standing room. Next Sunday nobody went: stalls, boxes, and pit all empty. So the minister went to the principal bar to ask the reason why. The chief man there—judge he was afterwards—took him up sharp enough.

"'You've got a fine new church, haven't you?'

"'Yes.'

"'And a hahnsome salary?'

"'Yes.'

"'And didn't we all come to give you a start?'

"'Yes.'

"'Then what on airth do you want more?'

"That's it, you see, rector. You get your innings every Sunday, and the people go to hear you just out of politeness and habit, and go away again. And if there's anything on airth you want more, you'd better try and work it another way."

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

THE very top attic of a very high house, in a street near the Haymarket. The sun shining brightly in at the windows, and baking the slates overhead. The windows shut close, nevertheless. A queer room: the roof ill-shapen, and the windows odd. The only furniture a bench or table of rough deal, running across the place just under the windows. The floor stained of a thousand hues: every inch of its surface is saturated with paints

and varnishes upset over it. The walls plastered with the scrapings of thousands of palettes, dried on in parti-coloured patches, and decorated with half a dozen soiled and smoke-begrimed cardboard scrolls, on which are written, like so many texts—"The eleventh commandment: Mind your own business," "From witchcraft, priestcraft, and king-craft, good Lord, deliver us," and such-like legends, the work of a former prisoner there. On the floor is a great stack of pictures, which have been taken out of their frames in order to undergo the process of cleaning; gallon cans of copal and mastic varnish stand by them, in readiness for the varnishing. At the bench stands a young man in his shirt sleeves, rubbing away as hard as he can at the resinous surface of an oil painting, rapidly getting the old varnish off with his finger ends, and working down to the artist's colours again. He works with a will, singing at his work in the finest tenor voice you ever heard outside the walls of the Covent Garden Opera House.

It is Frank Mellishp. How he came here I will briefly explain.

When ruin comes upon a young gentleman of expensive tastes, who has received the very best, and consequently the least useful, education that

his country has to boast of, it generally finds him in a helpless and very defenceless condition. This was, as we have seen, Frank Mellishipp's lot. He had no longer any money to spend, and he had not been taught how to get any. Poverty would not have frightened him much, because he was young, and did not know what it meant: what grinding years of self-sacrifice and denial, what bitterness of struggle, and what humiliations. But there were his mother and sister. To knock about for a year or two—no young man thinks he is going to be poor after five-and-twenty or so—would have had the charm of novelty. But for these two—the delicately reared gentlewomen—the change from the house at Market Basing to the miserable lodgings in Fitzroy-street, off the Fulham-road, was indeed a plunge. And though Kate did her best bravely to meet the inevitable, their mother, a weak and watery creature, never attempted to conceal the misery of her new position, and to lament the glories, which she naturally exaggerated, of the past.

"What have we done," she would say at each fresh reminder of the social fall—"what did *we* do to merit all this?"

Frank and Kate, with the sanguine enthusiasm

which belonged to their father's blood as well as to their time of life, tried to cheer her with pictures of the grand successes which were to come; but in vain. The good lady would only relapse into another of her weeping fits, and be taken to her room, crying, "Oh! Francis—oh! my poor husband!" till the enthusiasm was damped, and the present brought back to the brother and sister in all its nakedness.

Every day they took counsel together. Frank's bed-room, metamorphosed by Kate's clever hands till it looked no more like a bed-room than Mr. Swiveller's one apartment, served as their studio. An inverted case—which once, in what lodging-house keepers call their "happier days," had contained Clicquot or gooseberry—served as a platform, on which Frank stood for a model to his sister. They called it their throne.

"Do—my dear, good boy—do hold out your arm as I placed it," says Mistress Kate, sketching in rapidly, while Frank stands as motionless as he can before her in the best suit he has left. "I have wasted I don't know how much time to-day in getting up to put you right."

"My dear girl, can I stand—I put it to you—can I stand like a semaphore for an hour at a time?

Even a semaphore's arms go up and down, you know."

"Yes, I know, Frank, it's dreadfully tiresome, as I found when I sat for your Antigone. But see how patient I was."

The advantage was certainly on Frank's side, because Kate would stand in the same position for half an hour at a time—twice as long as a professional model.

"How far have you got, Kate?"

"Don't move now—a moment more—only five minutes, and I shall have finished the outline."

She is sketching on a boxwood block. It was the first order they had received: it was to illustrate a poem in a magazine, and the price was three guineas.

"If you go on at this rate," said Frank, "it will pay a great deal better than oils. Why, you can do a block a-day—easily—working up your backgrounds by candle-light."

"Yes—if we can get the orders; but you must not forget the trouble we had in getting the first."

"C'est le commencement," said Frank. "Et gai, gai—" he began to sing.

"Do *not* move just now. Please don't."

"'Bergeronnette,
Douce baisselette,
Donnez le moi votre chapelet,'"

sang her model, with one of his happy laughs. "Don't you remember, Katie, when I sang that jolly old French song last at Parkside, when Grace played the accompaniment? Dearest Grace! When shall I see her again?"

"Let us talk seriously," said Kate. "I am sure mamma *must* go away into the country somewhere. We could live cheaper there than we can in London, and I know she would get back her health at some quiet seaside place; and I could fill my sketch book with pretty bits, and work them up into landscapes, like those you sold—"

"For fifteen shillings each," Frank laughed.

His experience of picture selling had been rather disheartening. But still he hoped; nor was it unnatural that he should do so. He had a strong taste for art. He could do what few young men can do—draw nicely. He had been famous for his pen and ink sketches at Cambridge; but Kate was much more proficient with her pencil than he was.

Kate guided their course. She chose the lodgings near the Museum. She was bursar for the family, and did the marketing, often at night,

in the Fulham-road: for her mother would speedily have outrun the constable by a distance.

As it was, John Heathcote's gift was reduced to small dimensions.

Grace's hundred pounds Frank held sacred, proposing to use it for his mother.

Kate took the necessary steps to their painting at the public galleries. They went at first on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays to the Museum. Then Frank went on Thursdays and Fridays to the National Gallery, leaving Kate to go to the South Kensington Museum by herself. They wanted to learn Art. Now, Art is learned, they had been told, by copying. So they set to work to copy. Kate spent three days a-week for four months at Dyckmans' "Blind Beggar." It is a pretty picture, but copying it teaches nothing. She found that out before it was half done; but she made a splendid copy of it on panel, like the original. Frank copied Sir Joshua's "Heads of Angels," at the National. In this work there was something to be learnt. The softness, the delicacy, the angelic expression of those little cherubs' heads, all painted from one tiny mortal face, showed the student of art what it is in the hands of a master. And Reynolds is a master for a very

unartistic nation to be proud of. Frank had finished this picture when Kate's "Blind Beggar" was half done. The copy he made was very good. At the Gallery the old women praised it; and as they had often copied it themselves, they were judges. A dealer who came in one students' day called it "clever." He was a burly man, with a tremendously red nose that told its own tale of knock-outs. This professional opinion encouraged Frank. He had hoped to sell it to some of those connoisseurs of art who loiter round the students' easels on closed days; but there had been no bid.

He had it framed: it happened to be at the shop of the red-nosed man, whose name was Burls. He paid two pounds ten shillings for an appropriate Reynolds frame for it.

Then he put his picture into a cab, and tried the dealers all over the West-end with it.

"What! buy a copy of a picture in the National Gallery? Not unless we knew where we could place it!"

It was a knock-down blow for our innocent young artist; but it was the answer he got everywhere, from rough dealers and smooth, Hebrew and Gentile. So, at last, in despair, he left it at an auction room in Bond-street, where, a fortnight afterwards,

Kate and he attended, and bought it in at two pounds seven and sixpence—half a crown less than the frame that was on it had cost him ; and he had five per cent. commission to pay, and the cost of taking it home. This opened his eyes to the trade value of copies of pictures that are known.

A young lady at the Museum made friends with Kate—they all make friends with one another—and exhorted her to try at working on wood. So with Frank and her mother for models, and a background out of her sketch book, she made a pretty picture, and despatched Frank to lay siege to the editors.

He took a few water-colour sketches of his own with him, to show at one or two picture shops where he had seen similar sketches displayed in the windows.

He tried two shops—one was near Piccadilly—in his walk towards the publishers' shops. He was not afraid of talking to the shopkeepers, but he did feel a little nervous at the prospect of bearding an editor in his den.

So he showed his sketches, with some success. The answer at both the shops was—

"Do me some with shorter petticoats, and I'll give you forty-two shillings a dozen for them."

The shops were kept by brothers, and Frank's sketches were pretty young ladies. He profited by this experience.

He spent that afternoon, and the next, and the next after that in calling at different places with the inquiry, "Is the editor of the So-and-so in?"

With one result. The editor never was in—to a young man who did not know his name. At night, after the third of these excursions, he felt embittered towards these gentlemen, and told Kate he thought they might as well put their block in the fire, it would warm them so.

The weather was as warm as Frank's temper. Kate reproved him, and gave him her royal commands to try again.

"And now, Frank," she said after their mother had gone to bed, "I have made up my mind to go away from London, and take mamma with me—to Wales, I think. Living is cheap there, and the scenery is beautiful. She *must* be taken out of London."

Frank felt rather glad at this. He thought his mother and sister would be better in the country for a few months. When they came back to him, he meant to have a home for them.

"And I'll tell you why, Frank. I shall finish my

picture; but it is not easy to do that. There are three people at it now—such a vulgar man; and oh! two such vulgar women—and they race on a Wednesday morning to get up the stairs before me, and secure their seats for the week close to the picture. The man elbows roughly by me, and I can hardly get a look at the picture myself."

Frank began to fume—his fingers tingled.

"The authorities should make some proper rules, I think, for I began my copy before any of them. Of course, I can't race up the stairs with them, and tear through the rooms to be first at the picture; and, then, Frank—you'll promise me to do as I tell you?"

"I don't know, Kate. I think I shall be at the top of the stairs before that fellow some day soon—"

"There, now, I have done if you do not give me your word."

"Well—there, then—go on."

"Well, Frank, an old man—nobleman, they say he is—has been very attentive."

Her brother gave an angry snort, and his eyes looked very mischievous.

"Don't be angry—he is too ridiculous—the funniest old object, with teeth, and a wig, and stays, and a gold-headed cane. He wants to buy the

'Blind Beggar,' and has given me advice I don't want about painting it ; and to-day, Frank—"

"To-day, Kate?"

"He brought me a bouquet, which of course I declined to accept. But I thought it best to put away my picture, and leave the gallery."

"I shall be there to-morrow."

He was, and nearly every day after till Kate had finished her picture.

But the Earl of —— only paid one more visit to the Museum during his stay in town that season.

In the afternoon of the day on which Frank had given his card to his sister's admirer, he determined to try his luck again with the block and the portfolio of sketches. At the first place he called at, the man he saw took his name up to the editor of the magazine, and, to his great surprise, he was asked to walk upstairs.

He found himself in a dingy room, in the presence of a fatherly young man, with a grave but kind face.

Frank told him how surprised he was at having the opportunity of showing his specimens, and asking for work.

The editor of the "Universal Magazine" was a scholar and a gentleman. He drew the young man

out, looked at his sketches, and gave him a few words of judicious praise.

"But I don't use any blocks. The 'Universal' is not an illustrated magazine."

Frank was disappointed.

"I really had not thought of that," he stammered out.

"But I am always ready to help anybody I can. Wait a minute, Mr. Melliship. Your sister's drawings are really clever, and the sort of thing that is wanted. I will give you a note to a friend of mine who uses a great many illustrations." He handed Frank the letter, adding, "I shall be glad to hear of your success some day when you are passing this way. Stay, I will give you something else."

He wrote rapidly for five or six minutes, and then handed Frank a list of all the illustrated magazines of standing and respectability, with the names of their editors.

"I have put a star to those where you may just mention my name."

Frank thanked his new friend very sincerely, and bowed himself out—to get an order for a block fifteen minutes after.

The editor of the "Universal" blew down a pipe at his desk. Whistle.

"Sir?"

"Look in the contributor's book, vol. xxvii. Who wrote the article on 'Commercial Morality?'"

After an interval of ten minutes, a whistle in the editor's room.

"Well?"

"Mr. Francis Melliship, banker, Market Basing, Holmshire."

"Ah, I thought I knew the name. If I am not mistaken, I shall be able to pay this young man what his father refused to receive, the honorarium for several articles he did for us."

He entered Frank's name in his note-book.

But Frank was not the sort of gentleman to be helped. He would not ask anybody for assistance. Dick Mortiboy would have helped him; John Heathcote would have helped him; and in London, a dozen men who had known his father would have taken him by the hand. But Frank was too proud. He would make his own way—to Grace. It was always Grace, this goal he was hastening to. He devoured her letter to Kate. He inspired Kate's epistles in reply.

"Burn the boy's nonsense," honest John Heathcote had said a dozen times. "If we could only get at him, we might do something for him.

Painter! I would as soon see a boy of mine a fiddler."

But Mrs. Heathcote was rather pleased than not.

"What in the world can he do without any money?" she said. "If his father had brought him up to something, he would have stood the same chance as other people."

As the summer advanced, Mrs. Mellishipp's health became worse, and it was decided that Kate and she should go away into Wales. Kate had sold her "Blind Beggar" for twenty pounds, and with this money they paid their few debts, and Frank saw them off.

The world was before him. He took a lodging in Islington, and went on with his painting. He still meant to be famous. One fine morning he had no money left except a five pound note he had resolved never to break into. This brought him down from the clouds. He had not been successful in getting any work for the magazines, so he determined, at whatever sacrifice, to turn his "Angels' Heads" into money.

He took it first to Mr. Burl's shop, and told the

picture dealer he had tried hard to sell it before, but had been unable to dispose of it.

"It isn't in our way, sir."

"Is it in anybody's way?" asked Frank.

"I should think not. Copies aren't no good at all."

"Would you give me anything for it?" asked the young man.

"Well, you may leave it if you like. I've got a customer I don't mind showing it to."

Frank called again a few days after.

"I'll give you six pounds for it, and then I dare say I shall lose by it," said Mr. Burls.

He had sold it for eighteen guineas to a customer who collected Sir Joshuas, and bought copies when the originals were not likely to come into the market. But Frank did not know this. He accepted the six pounds eagerly.

"I'm a ready-money man, my lad—there's your coin."

"Thank you," said Frank, pocketing the six sovereigns. "You have a great many pictures, Mr. Burls."

And he might have added, "very great rubbish they are."

"There's seventeen hundred pictures in this

house, from cellar to garrets, lad," said the dealer.

They stood in stacks, eight or ten thick, round the cellar, down the open trap of which Frank could see. They were piled everywhere. One canvas, thirty feet by ten, was screwed up to the ceiling. They were numberless pictures of every age and school, Titians and Tenierses, Snyderses and Watteaus: all the kings of England, from the Conqueror down to William IV.; ancestors ready for hanging in the pseudo-baronial halls of the nouveaux riches;—in a word, furniture pictures by the gross.

"If there was seventeen hundred before, yours makes the seventeenth hundred and oneth, don't it?"

The dealer was pleased to joke. His shopman laughed, and Frank did too. He had put his pride in his pocket, for Mr. Burls amused him.

"Now, this here Sir Joshua ought to be wet; and not to ask you to stand, suppose we torse."

Frank assented, lost, and paid for three glasses.

"Where's Critchett?—I haven't seen him to-day?" Mr. Burls asked of his man.

"He has not turned up. The old complaint, I expect."

"Well, you can tell him from me, when he does turn up, he's got to the end of his tether," said Mr. Burls, very angrily. "Be dashed if I employ such a vagabond any longer. There's this picture of Mr. Thingamy's for him to restore, and I promised it this week faithfully."

"He's often served you so before," said the man.

But this remark did not soothe the dealer. It made him only the more angry.

Now, Mr. Frank Mellishipp had got to the end of his tether, too, for he had only the six pounds he had just received, and no immediate prospect of being able to earn more.

Opportunity comes once in a way to every man. It had come to Frank, and he determined to make the most of it.

"Could I restore the picture for you?"

It was a great ugly daub—a copy, a hundred years old probably, of some picture in a Dutch gallery—and stood on the floor by Frank. Doubtless it had a value in the eyes of its owner, who thought it worthy of restoration: but a viler, blacker tatterdemalion of a canvas you never saw.

At Frank's question, Mr. Burls opened his eyes very wide.

"Show us your hands," he said. "That's what

they say to beggars as say they're innocent at the station. Ah! I thought so—you ain't done any hard work. Now, perhaps you're what I call a gingerbread gentleman. Are you?"

The colour mounted to Frank's cheeks.

"I want employment. I am a poor man."

"He aint no use to us—is he, Jack?"

Jack, Mr. Burls's man, shook his head.

"I could repaint that picture where it wants it," said Frank.

"Did you ever restore a picture before? Restoring's an art: it's a thing as isn't learnt in a moment, I can tell you. 'Pictures cleaned, lined, and restored by a method of our own invention, without injury, and at a moderate charge,'" said Mr. Burls, quoting an inscription in gilt letters over Frank's head. "Now, did you ever clean a picture?"

"No," said Frank.

"Do you think you could do the painting part if I taught you how to clean and restore on the system I invented myself?"

"I think I could," said Frank.

"But if I teach you the secrets of the trade, what are you going to give me?"

"I'm afraid I can't afford to give you anything," said Frank, "except labour."

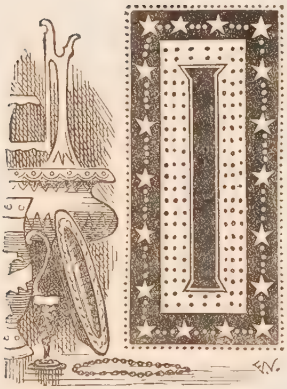
"It's worth fifty pounds to anybody to know. Critchett might have made a fortune at it. Look at me. I began as an errand boy. I'm not ashamed of it. A good restorer can always keep himself employed."

"Indeed," said Frank—who contemplated with admiration a man who had been the founder of his own fortune—"I should very much like to learn the art of restoring, as I have not been successful in getting a living as an artist."

"Well," said the dealer, "I'll see first what you're up to, and whether you can paint well enough for me if I was to teach you the restoring. You may come upstairs. Bring that picture up on your shoulder."

Frank hoisted the canvas aloft, and followed Mr. Burls up the stairs.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.



IT was not very easy for Frank to get the picture round the turns of the narrow iron staircase, circular in form, which led from Mr. Burls's shop to the room above, which he called the gallery. In this room, Frank saw that there were a number of pictures hanging round the walls, and on several tall screens. They were of a better class than those in the shop. Mr. Burls led the way through the gallery to a narrow flight

of stairs at the end. Mounting these, with the canvas on his shoulder, Frank found more rooms full of pictures, framed and unframed, in stacks that reached up to his chin.

On the floor above, a number of men were employed in gilding and repairing frames. Up one more flight of stairs, and they were on the attic floor, apparently the sanctum of Mr. Critchett, the restorer—for in a little back room were his easels and palettes, and his battered tubes of paint, and several short and very black clay pipes.

"I find the materials," said Mr. Burls. "I've paid for all the paints and brushes, so I suppose they're mine."

"Certainly," said Frank.

"Now you can set to work on that Cuyp as you've carried upstairs; and then I shall see what you're up to, and whether you'll suit me. If you aint got all the paints you want, come to me."

With this remark, Mr. Burls left Frank; and, pulling off his coat, set to work himself in the front room, a short description of which I gave at the beginning of my last chapter.

Left to himself, Frank looked about him. There was a good light, to the north; but when he stood

upright anywhere in the room, his head nearly touched the ceiling.

The prospect from his window was limited almost entirely to tiles and chimney pots.

Pasted to the walls were a number of prints of the most celebrated characters of English history, which—as Frank rightly guessed—were used in the production of the genuine antique portraits which were founded upon them. Mr. Critchett had left a Queen Elizabeth, in a great starched ruff and jewelled stomacher, in an unfinished state on his easel.

The furniture of his atelier was by no means luxurious. It consisted of a cane-seated chair, with three orthodox legs, and an old mahl stick for a fourth. A high rush hassock, tied on this chair, led Frank to suppose that his predecessor had been a short man. There were, besides, three easels, a fireplace with a black kettle on the hob, and several canvases—some new, some old—in the corners; and this was all.

Having made this short tour of inspection, Frank settled down at once to his work.

He found it easy;—little patches of paint gone here and there all over the portrait; and he supplied these, carrying out, as well as he could interpret it, the design of the original painter.

Mr. Burls was constantly walking in and out of the room, and looking over his shoulder, and volunteering unnecessary pieces of advice.

At four o'clock he left off "chafing" his pictures, and looked in at Frank, smearing his coarse hands with spirits, to get off the dirt with which they were ditched.

"There," said he, "I've done for to-day. I've chafed fifteen pictures: that's fifteen pound earned. I shall charge them a quid a-piece for doing 'em. I don't work for nothing, and I don't know anybody in the picture trade that does."

At six, he came up to Frank again, and looked at his work.

"That'll do, my lad—that'll do," and went away again.

This cheered Frank, and he worked as long as it was light, and walked home to his lodgings at Islington a happy man.

Next day he finished the job, and Mr. Burls passed judgment on his work. It was favourable to him; and he was duly installed in the place of Critchett, kicked out.

Frank wrote and told his sister and mother, staying at Llan-y-Fyddloes, that he had got regular

employment that suited him very well, and that his prospects were brightening.

He did this to cheer them, and to some extent he believed what he said.

"If," he wrote to Kate, "I can only earn enough to keep myself, and send something every week to you, by the work I am at, and still leave myself time for study and improvement, I am satisfied. Depend upon it, you shall see me in the catalogue at the Academy before long, No. 00001, 'Interior of a studio,' by—" drawing a very fair likeness of himself by way of signature to his letter.

He said nothing to Kate about the amount of money he could earn at his new work, nor did he tell her what it was exactly. His reason for the first was that he wrote his letter before he had settled terms with Mr. Burls; for the second, because he knew his mother would become hysterical at the bare idea of her son working for a living in any but the most gentlemanlike manner, such as society permits. Now, for his part, Frank saw nothing degrading in any honest labour, and was quite content to put up for a while with such humble occupation.

"Hang it," he thought, "I'd rather do it than sponge on somebody else."

But Kate guessed it was something rather beneath his dignity to do, he was so reserved.

His arrangement with the picture dealer was in these terms :—

Burls : "I'm fair and straight, I am. I should not have got on if I'd done as many chaps do."

Frank : "To be sure. I think I am tolerably straightforward, too, Mr. Burls. I hope so, at least."

Burls : "I don't know nothing about you, do I ?"

Frank (reddening) : "No."

Burls : "Well, I don't want to ask no questions, my lad."

The man's familiarity was disgusting. It was a fine lesson in self-command for Frank to make himself stomach it.

"You want work, and I'll give you some. You can work for me instead of old Critchett. I'm fair and straight with you. Some chaps would want you to work six months for nothing."

Frank : "I could not do that."

Burls, continuing : "I don't ask you. You shall have what Critchett had—that's a shillin' an hour ; and handsome pay, too, I call it. I like to pay my chaps well. Regular work, too. You may work eight hours a-day if you like, and then

you'll take eight and forty shillin' a-week, you know."

Mr. Burls appealed to his shopman to support his statement that Frank's predecessor often "took eight and forty a-week."

The terms seemed fair; though the remuneration for restoring, which required artistic skill, seemed to Frank to bear no just proportion to the money to be got by cleaning—for Mr. Burls earned fifteen pounds before dinner at that, Frank recollected.

However, he could hardly expect to get more than Critchet had received before him; so he agreed to take a shilling an hour, and work regularly for Mr. Burls.

Burls: "Done, then, and settled. We don't want any character, do we, Jack? Pictures aint easy things to carry out of the shop, are they?"

Frank (very angry): "Sir!"

Burls: "No offence. Don't get angry. It was only a hint that we should not trouble you for references to your last employment. Rec'lect what I said about those hands. You've been brought up a gentleman, I dare say, but you're right not to starve your belly to feed your pride. Don't be

angry with me. I'm straight and fair, I am. You'll find me that."

I have now explained how Frank came to be in the top attic of Mr. Burl's house of business. He remained in his situation about three months. While there, he learned a great deal. Mr. Burls took a fancy to him, and soon came to stand a little in awe of him—for he was educated and honest, and, in addition, plainly a gentleman. The dealer was very ignorant, and, from any point of view but that of his own class of traders, very dishonest—that is, he looked upon the public, his customers, as fair game; and would tell any lie, and any sequence of lies, to sell a spurious picture for and at the price of a genuine picture. The morals of commerce, in the hands of the Burlses, find their lowest ebb.

But, to some extent, their customers make them what they are. If a man who has money to spend on his house will have pictures for his walls, why not prefer a new picture to an old one? Why not an honest print before a dishonest canvas?

But it is always the reverse. He has a hundred pounds to lay out, and he wants ten pictures for the money—bargains—speculative pictures, with

famous names to them, which he can comment on and enlarge upon, and point out the beauties of to his friends, until he actually comes to believe the daub he gave ten guineas for is a Turner; and the dealers can find him hundreds.

Why, the old masters must have painted pictures faster than they could nowadays print them, if a quarter of the things that are sold in their names were their true works. There are probably more pictures ascribed to any one famous old master now for sale in the various capitals of Europe, than he could have produced had he painted a complete work every day, from the day he was born till the day he died—and lived to be seventy, too.

Burls could find his customers anything they asked for. No painter so rare, so sought after, or so obscure, but there were some works of his, a bargain, in the dealer's stock.

He told Frank his history:—

"My father wore a uniform: he was a park-keeper in Kensington Gardens. I went to school till I was thirteen, then I went out as an errand boy. My master was a dealer, in St. James's Street. I got to learn the gilding and cleaning; and when I was six-and-twenty, I earned two pounds a-week. Well, my father had an old friend,

and he had had some money left him. He gave his son two hundred pounds, and we went into business. His son died before we'd been partners a year. I bought his share, and here I am. I shall die worth a hundred thousand pounds, Shipley"—(this was Frank's name at Mr. Burls's)—"and this business thrown in—mark my words."

This was his story, and it was true. Like all men who have risen from nothing, Mr. Burls was inordinately pleased with himself. He attributed to his great ability what really ought to have been put down to his great luck.

He would be a fine specimen for the "Self-Help" collection in Mr. Samuel Smiles's book.

"Mind you," he often said to Frank, "there aint a man in ten thousand that could have done what I've done."

Now, Burls's life, as I read it and as Frank read it, was simply an example of the power of luck. Serving under a kind master, who lets him learn his trade. Luck. Finding a man who wants to put his son into business, and is willing to trust him. Luck. Getting all to himself. Luck. His shop pulled down by the Board of Works, in order to widen a street. Compensation paid just when he wants money, at the end of his second year's

trade. Luck. And so on. Look into every adventure he has made, luck crowned it with success. And how we all worship success that brings wealth! Why, weak Mrs. Melliship would rather have seen Frank succeed in making himself as rich as Dick Mortiboy, than that his name should have been handed down to endless centuries as the writer of a greater epic than Milton, or the painter of a greater picture than the greatest of Raphael's cartoons. Frank, on the other hand, never told all his story to his employer, but he was constrained to explain why he was in a position so different to that he had been brought up in. And he did it in a few words, and without any expression of complaint. Burls only knew that his father had lost money by rash speculation, and had died, leaving Frank without resources. He did not inquire further, but remarked—

"What aint in my business is in the three per cent. Consols. Your father's ought to have been there."

Soon there came a very busy time at cleaning pictures, and Burls asked Frank to help him.

He found it a mighty simple matter, though it rubbed the skin off his fingers at first.

"Lay the canvas down," said Burls, "and rub it. If the varnish comes off after a few rubs of your

finger, it's mastic, and 'll all rub off clean down to the paint. If it won't chafe, it's copal, and you must get it off with spirits, and be careful not to take the paint away with it. I've seen that done often."

So Frank and Burls spent much of their time together, chafing the dirty varnish off old pictures. When they had rubbed it off, and got down to the paint, one or the other dipped a wide brush in mastic varnish, dabbed it on like whitewash on a ceiling, and then laid the canvas flat on the floor of the next room.

"It all dries down smooth enough," Burls said, "That's the beauty of it."

And this, gentle British public, is the art of cleaning old oil paintings on a system invented by ourselves, without the slightest injury or damage, advertised by Bartholomew Burls and Co., Trafalgar-street, Haymarket. Country orders carefully attended to. And you are charged for it entirely according to Mr. Burls's belief in your capacity to pay—sometimes ten shillings, sometimes ten pounds; but the process is always the same, and it takes a very slightly skilled labourer any time from fifteen minutes to sixty to complete the operation.

Sometimes the pictures wanted repainting in

places: then Frank took them into his own room, and did what was required, before they were varnished off.

"Mind you, cleaning's an art, and I've taught it you," Mr. Burls would say.

For painting and painters he had a proper contempt. He bought their works so cheap, and they —at least, the specimens he saw—were always such poor devils. But gilding frames, cleaning and restoring pictures—these were profitable arts, and he respected them.

He told Frank many queer anecdotes of the trade, of his customers, and how he had imposed upon their credulity. And how credulous customers are, only such men as Mr. Burls know.

He told him tales of the sales and knock-outs; and one day took him to one at a public-house in Pall-mall, where Frank formed an acquaintance with the habits, customs, and language of the trade, and saw all the lots they had bought at Christie's put up again, and resold among themselves at a good profit.

"Look at that," said Mr. Burls one day to Frank —"that's a seller, ain't it? I lay you a new hat I don't have that here a fortnight, and I shall ask sixty guineas for it."

"Is it not the one that has been in the shop some time?" Frank asked.

"No, it ain't; but it's the own brother to it, and here's two more of the family—only they ain't done up yet," said the dealer, pulling down two other canvases from a rack.

Frank opened his eyes—wide.

The pictures were landscapes in the style of Claude. The first was cracked all over, respectably dirty, and looked certainly a hundred years old. The paint of the other two was scarcely dry.

"It would have deceived me, I believe," said Frank.

"Deceive anybody," said Mr. Burls. "Now, you wouldn't look at that picture and think it's only a month old, would you? That's all it is. It was like these here two a month ago. I've sold four or five of 'em."

"It would not do to sell them to intimate friends, would it?" said Frank.

"Trust me for that. I send 'em about the country. I've bought everything lately at an old maiden lady's at Bexley Heath, and described the place to the customers; but I think I've used it up about. Give us a good name, now, of a place for stuff to come from."

Frank thought a moment, and suggested Compton Green.

"Where's Compton Green?" asked Mr. Burls.

"It's five miles from Market Basing, in Holmshire," said Frank.

"Well, I'll try Compton Green. I've got a customer coming to look at some pictures to-day. I hope it'll be as lucky as Bexley Heath has been. Jack and me's sold some hundreds now, I think, from there; so it's time we had a change."

"Do," said Frank. "It has one advantage, at all events, nobody will know it."

"Now I'm going to show my customer this Claude. I wish I'd got a dozen as good. It cost me fifteen pounds; and it wasn't painted half a mile from where we stand. I want some imitations. Couldn't you paint me some?"

Frank tried; and, after some time, succeeded, to Mr. Burls's entire satisfaction, in imitating Old Crome.

"That's right enough," said the dealer. "I'll give you ten pound a-piece for a dozen as good as that."

Frank was delighted. Here was fortune come at last.

"I'm fair and straight, I am," said the dealer.

"There ain't much in painting 'em when you've been showed what's wanted. It's the doing 'em up. That's a secret as only a few of us have got. It cost me something to learn it, I can tell you. I paid for it, and it's paid me. This picture, when I've done with it, 'll be worth sixty, if it's worth a sovereign. But there's art, I can tell you, in doing what I do to 'em."

There always was, according to Mr. Burls's version of the case, art in doing anything to a picture but painting it.

Frank watched the processes his picture went through with interest.

It went to be lined, and stretched on an old strainer. As it was to be an old picture, the supposed old canvas it was painted on must be concealed by a lining.

Then it received several coats of mastic varnish, in which red and yellow lake and other colours were mixed to tone it down, laid on with Burls's liberal hand. As the first coat dried, a second, and so on.

Then it was brushed over one night with a substance which we have all eaten times without number. In the morning, Frank's Old Crome was cracked all over.

He was astonished, and well he might be. The surface, hard and dry, was a network of very thin cracks. It was put into a real old frame of the period, the door mat shaken over canvas and frame several days in succession, and the business was complete.

The picture looked old and mellow; the cracks bore witness to its genuineness; it had been lined to keep the rotting canvas from dropping to pieces as it stood; but the frame was the one it had always hung in, in the old manor house at Compton Green.

"It's a simple thing when you know how to do it, ain't it?" asked Mr. Burls of Frank.

"It is, indeed," said the artist, astonished at his own work in its altered guise. "It is simple."

But what that simple thing is I must not tell, or I shall have some of my younger readers trying the experiment of cracking their fathers' pictures; and it wants some practice to ensure success in making the cracks natural in appearance, and not having too many of them.

Frank set to work to make more of these imitations.

He made them to order, not being a party to any deception which his employer might practise.

A copy, or an imitation, whichever Mr. Burls wanted. What the dealer chose to do with it when the order was executed, was nothing to Frank. At the same time he had a shrewd suspicion, though Burls said nothing, that his pictures were sold as originals. It must be stated that Burls did not always sell a copy as an original. The imitations brought Frank ten pounds each; but they lost him his employment. In this way.

One day, as he was going out to his tea, when he got as far as the iron staircase that connected the gallery with the shop, he observed Burls showing some pictures to two customers: one of these was his Old Crome.

"Compton Green, I assure you, they all came from," Burls was saying.

"Near Market Basing?" asked a clerical old gentleman, who was one of his two customers.

"That's the place, sir. I fetched 'em all away myself, I assure you."

"But there is nobody there who ever had any pictures. I live near the village myself."

Here was a facer for the dealer.

He saw Frank, and called him. Frank had given him the name. Frank must get him out of the scrape.

"Here, Shipley"—he winked hard—"you went down with me to fetch these pictures. Tell this gentleman the house we got 'em from. It's a genuine Crome as ever I sold, sir"—Frank was coming up the shop, and the old gentleman's back was turned towards him—"and it's a cheap picture at sixty guineas. I would not take pounds for it."

By this time Frank was close to him.

"Tell this gentleman where we got these pictures from, every one of them. You went with me."

Burls made a great mistake in his man. Frank was not going to tell lies for him. Besides, he knew the customer.

The old gentleman turned round, and saw him before he could escape. He fell back a step or two, shaded his eyes with his hand, looked very hard at Frank, then exclaimed, cordially holding out his hand—

"God bless me! Young Mr. Mellishipl!"

"Dr. Perkins!" stammered Frank.

"My dear young gentleman, who ever would have thought of seeing you here?"

Frank was interrupted in a rambling apology by Mr. Burls.

"Very clever young man—invaluable to me.

He'll tell you"—here he winked again at Frank—"all about the place we fetched them from."

"Well, I shall have some other things to talk about with him of more importance; but perhaps he will excuse me if, to settle this, I ask where possibly at Compton Green there could be pictures without me knowing it?"

"Ah!" said Burls, "he can tell you. I go into so many houses, I forget where they are almost."

"Nowhere," said Frank, looking Dr. Perkins—whom he knew as an old friend of his father's—full in the face. "I painted it myself."

And he was gone out of the shop. It was in vain the old clergyman and his son-in-law tried to overtake him. They soon lost sight of him in the crowded street.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

"I MUST tell you," wrote Grace to Kate, "of the great day we had at Derngate. You know all the dreadful news, because Lucy has told you how Uncle Mortiboy, after he had given all his money to Dick, had a paralytic stroke, and is quite helpless now. He seems to know people, though he cannot speak. He gives a sort of a grunt for 'yes,' and frowns when he means 'no.' Though we feel sure he will never recover his faculties again, poor old man, he is not at all a pitiable object to look at. He has completely lost the use of one side, and partially that of the other. His face is drawn curiously out of shape, and it gives him a happy and pleasant look he never used to

have. He actually looks as if he were smiling all the while—a thing, as you know, he did not often do. They have taken him downstairs, and old Hester looks after him. Dick has moved into that little villa which stands across the river, the only house there. He has a boat to go across in. It seems a prosaic way of getting over a river for a man who knows all about California and Texas, doesn't it? I told him that we all expected him to strike out a new idea.

"But the moving was the great thing. He asked us all there to come down while he ransacked the old house. So down we went. We went in to see poor old Mr. Mortiboy, and he seemed to know us, and to want to speak; but it was no use. Then our voyage of discovery began. We had Mr. Tweedy, the builder, who went about with the house-steps and a hammer. He went first. Dick came next. We followed, pretending not to be at all curious; and old Hester brought up the rear.

"First, Aunt Susan's room. Then we opened all her drawers, boxes, and cupboards. There was nothing in one of them except old letters and things of no interest or value. 'The old man,' Dick said, 'has been here before us.' I don't think that it's nice of him to speak of his father

in that way; though mamma declares that his voice always shakes as he does it. All poor aunt's dresses were hanging up just as she had left them. Dick gave every one to mamma, with her lace—you know what beautiful lace Aunt Susan had. There is not much, after all; for she never dressed very well, as you know. Mamma transferred the gowns to old Hester on the spot, and kept the lace, of course.

"Then we went downstairs to the first floor—Mr. Mortiboy's own floor. Here we had a surprise. In the room was a long press, which Dick opened. My dear Kate, it was full of gold and silver cups, and plate of all kinds.

"Dick tossed them all on the table with his usual careless manner.

"'Now, cousins,' he said, 'if you can find anything here with the Heathcote crest on it, take it.'

"I found an old cup, which must have been my great-grandfather's, which I took home to papa.

"'I am going to pick out the Mortiboy plate,' said Dick, 'and sell all the rest.'

"Oh, Kate! among the rest was a great deal of yours, which Uncle Mortiboy had bought up from the sale. I waited till mamma was not looking, and I begged him not to sell that. He did not

know that it was yours, and promised. So that is all safe for the present. And then he produced Aunt Susan's jewels and trinkets, and divided them between Lucy and me. I shall have such splendours to show you when we meet again. It is old-fashioned, of course, but very good.

"Then he put all the things back again.

"'We're going to look for money,' he said. 'Hester says he used to hide it away.'

"Then we saw the use of the steps and the hammer. Mr. Tweedy went about hammering everywhere, to see if things were solid or hollow. In a window-seat which he forced open—it had been screwed down—we found a bag full of guineas. I have one of them now. Behind a panel of the wainscoting, which had a secret spring—I did not know there were any houses in Market Basing with secret springs and panels—we found not a skeleton, my dear, with a dagger stuck in its ribs, as there ought to have been in a secret cupboard, but another bag, with thirty old spade guineas in it. Wherever a hiding place could be made, Uncle Mortiboy had hidden away some money. There was quite a handsome sum in an old and well-darned stocking foot, and ever so many guineas under his bed. He seems to have

had a great penchant for saving guineas. Hester says he thought they brought luck.

"How much is left to find, of course we cannot tell. It seems now that he was never quite easy in his mind about the things in his house. You know their queer, narrow old staircase? Well, he used always to take his after-dinner nap on the stairs, where nothing could pass him without awaking him; and he used to pay the policeman extra money for giving a special look at the house. How it was he was not robbed, I can't think.

"After all this, we went home, loaded with spoil. Mamma began again about Dick's 'intentions;' but that only annoys me a very little now.

"Dick has got old Mrs. Lumley, whom you know, to look after him. But he won't let her sleep in the house. He fired pistols at his first woman, and she ran away. But Mrs, Lumley is not afraid, and I haven't heard of any pistols being fired at her.

"When are you going to give me fresh news of Frank? Kate, dear, give him my love—my real and only love—and tell him not to forget me, and to keep up his courage. If he would only be helped, all would be well. I am sure papa liked him better

than anybody that came to Parkside. And, after all, papa—is papa."

It was a fine time this, for Polly. She had plenty of Dick's society. He was at home nearly every evening, and generally alone. Then she would sit with him while he drank, smoked, told her queer stories, and sang her jovial sea-songs. As for her, she always behaved as a lady, put on a silk dress every evening, and invariably had her bottle of port before her, carrying her adherence to the usages of polite society so far as very often to finish it.

Occasional wayfarers along the towing-path would hear sounds of merriment and singing. It was whispered that Dick Mortiboy even entertained the Evil One himself, and regaled him with cigars and brandy.

Sometimes they played at cards, games that Dick taught her. Sometimes they used to quarrel, but not often; because once, when she threatened her husband, he took her by the shoulders, and turned her out of doors.

Her venerable parent was a bedridden old lady, of prepossessing ugliness, who resided in a cottage,

neither picturesque nor clean, in the outskirts of Market Basing. By the assistance of her daughter, she was able to rub along and get her small comforts. She was not a nice old lady to look at, nor was she eminently moral; being one of those who hold that lies cost nothing, and very often bring in a good deal.

"Get money out of him, Polly," she said. "Get as much as you can—it won't last, you know."

"And why shouldn't it last? What's to prevent it lasting, you old croaker?"

"The other will turn up some day, Polly. I know it—I'm certain of it. Make him give you money. Tell him it's for Bill."

"Mother, Dick's no fool. I've had fifty pounds out of him for little Bill in the last four months. I told him, only a fortnight ago, that Bill had got the scarlet fever! and he told me to go to the devil. He's deep, too. He doesn't say anything, but he's down on you all of a sudden. Mother, I lie awake at night, and tremble sometimes. I'm afraid of him, he is so masterful."

"But try, Polly, my dear—try. Tell him I want things at my time of life."

"I might do that. But it's no use pretending

anything about Bill for awhile. The other night he said Bill was played out. He wants to know where the boy is, too."

"Where is he, Polly? Tell your old mother, deary."

"Sha'n't," said Polly.

She made a long story about her mother that very night, and coaxed ten pounds out of Dick for her. The old woman clutched the gold, and put it away under her pillow, where she kept all the money that Polly got out of Dick.

It was odd that he could endure the woman at all. She was rough-handed, rough-tongued, coarse minded, intriguing, and crafty—and he knew it. Her tastes were of the lowest kinds. She liked to eat and drink, and do little work. They had no topics in common. But he was lazy, and liked to "let things slide." She had all the faults that a woman can have; but she had a sort of cleverness which was not displeasing to him. Sometimes he would hate her. This was generally after he had been spending an evening at Parkside—almost the only house he visited.

Here, under the influence of the two girls and their father, he became subdued and sobered. The subtle influence of the pure and sweet domestic

life was strong enough to touch him : to move him, but not to bring him back.

The sins of youth are never forgiven or forgotten. Now, when all else went well with Dick, when things had turned out beyond his wildest hopes, this woman—whom he had married in a fit of calf love—stood in his way, and seemed to drag him down again when he would fain have risen above his own level. Other things had passed away and been forgotten. There was no fear that the old Palmiste business would be revived. Facts and reports, ugly enough, were safe across the Atlantic. Of the twelve years of Bohemian existence no one knew : they were lost to history as completely as the forty years' wandering of the Israelites. Only Lafleur, who was sure to keep silent for his own sake, knew. And this woman alone stood in the way, warning him back from the paths of respectability—an Apollyon whom it was impossible to pass.

But one evening, Polly, who had come in to see him, cried in a maudlin way over the love she had for the boy ; and pulling her handkerchief out of her pocket to dry her eyes, dragged with it a letter, which Dick, who was sitting opposite her and not too far off, instantly covered with his foot. Igno-

rant of her loss, she went on crying till the fit passed; and then, finishing off the port, marched away in rather a corkscrew fashion. Dick, lifting his foot, picked up the letter and read it.

It was a very odd epistle, and was dated from some suburb of London of which he knew nothing, called "Paragon-place, Gray's Inn-road."

The orthography was that of a person imperfectly educated, and Dick deciphered it with some difficulty.

"MY DEER POLY"—it went—"escuse Me trubbling you butt im hard up, haveing six of themm Cussed babies to look after and methoosalem and Little bill do eat ther Heds of and what with methoosalem as wont wurk and bill as Wont Prig im most crasy with them you Owe me for six munths which six Pound ten and hope as youll send me the munney sharp as Else bill he cuts his Lucky so as hes your own Son and not mine i dont see wy should kepe him any longer for Nuthink and remain dear poly your affeckshunit

"ANN MARIA KNEEBONE.

"P.s.—[This in another hand]—i see the old woman a ritin her letter wich it toke her hall day

and the babies a starvin, so i had a P.s. to say as she is verry hard up and so am i and so his bill.

"METHOOSALEM."

Dick read this precious epistle with a look of extreme bewilderment. Then he read it over again. Gradually arriving at a sense of its meaning, he looked again at the address and the name, so as not to forget them—he never forgot anything—and then he twisted it up and burned it in the candle. After that he went to bed, putting off meditation till the following morning. Dick was not going to spoil his night's rest because Polly had told him lies.

Little Bill—that was Polly's child; presumably, therefore, his as well. Therefore, little William Mortiboy—the heir-apparent to his father's fortunes.

"William Mortiboy's position," said Dick to himself, next morning after breakfast, "appears unsatisfactory. He lives with a lady named Kneebone, who has a lodging-house for babies. Wonder if the babies like the lodgings? William Mortiboy associates, apparently, with a gentleman called Methoosalem, who refuses to work. Is he one of the babies? Wonder if he is! William Mortiboy

is expected to prig. That's a devilish bad beginning for William. William Mortiboy's companions are not, apparently, the heirs to anything—not even what the man in the play calls a stainless name. Polly, I'm afraid you're a bad lot! . . . . . Anyhow, you might have paid the five bob a-week out of all the money you've had in the last four months. But we'll be even with you. Only wait a bit, my lady."

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

IT was a godly and an ancient custom in Market Basing, that, on a certain Sunday afternoon in the year, the children should have a "church parade" all to themselves, followed by a bun. Of late years, an addition had been made to this festival by setting apart a week-day in the summer for a school feast and treat. It was generally a dreary affair enough. The boys and girls were marshalled, and marched to some field not far off, where they were turned loose pre-

vious to the tea, and told to play. As the Market Basing boys saw no novelty in a field—unlike the Londoner, to whom a bird's nest is a new discovery, and a field-mouse the most remarkable of wild animals—these feasts, although preceded by cake and followed by tea, had no great charms. Perhaps they were overweighted by hymns.

Now, Dick, pursuing that career of social usefulness already hinted at, had succeeded, in a very few weeks, in alienating the affections of all the spiritual leaders of the town. The way was this. First, he refused to belong to the chapel any more, and declined to pay for a pew in the church, on the reasonable ground that he did not intend to go to either. They came to him—Market Basing was regularly whipped and driven to religion, if not to godliness—to give money to their pet society, which, they said, called alike for the support of church and chapel, for providing Humble Breakfasts and flannel in winter for the Deserving Poor. This was explained to mean, not the industrious poor, nor the provident poor, nor the sober poor, but the poor who attended some place of worship. Dick said that not going to church did not of itself prove a man to be irreligious, artfully instancing himself as a case in point; and refused to help.

Then the secretaries of London societies, finding out that there was another man who had money to give, and was shown already to be of liberal disposition, sent him begging letters through the curates. They all got much the same answer. The missionary societies were dismissed because, as Dick told them, he had seen missionaries with his own eyes. That noble institution in Lincoln's Inn Fields, which exists for the double purpose of maintaining a large staff and converting the Jews, was refused on the ground of no results commensurable with the expense. He offered, indeed, a large sum for a successful mission among the professions—especially the bar—in England. And he rashly proposed a very handsome prize—no less than a thousand pounds—to anybody who would succeed in converting *him*. Rev. Potiphar Demas, a needy vessel, volunteered; but Dick declined to hear him, because he didn't want to know what Mr. Demas had to say. Now, this seemed discourteous, to the reverend gentleman.

All this might have been counterbalanced by his many virtues. For it was notorious that he had given a pension to old Sanderson, the ruined cashier of Melliship's bank; also that he had withdrawn the Mortiboy claims on the Melliship estate:

this was almost as if the Americans were to withdraw their Alabama claims, because there was no knowing where they might end. Besides which, it made an immediate difference of four shillings in the pound. Further, sundry aged persons who had spent a long life in cursing the name of Mortiboy, took to praising it altogether, because Dick was helping them all. And the liberality towards his clerks with which he inaugurated his reign was almost enough of itself to make him popular.

But then came that really dreadful business about the old women. This, although he was gaining a golden name by making restitution for his father's ill deeds—like Solomon repairing the breaches which his father David had made—was enough to make all religious and right-minded people tremble in their shoes. Everybody knows that humility in the aged poor is the main virtue which they are expected to display. In the church at Market Basing was a broad middle aisle, down which was ranged a row of wooden benches, backless, cushionless, hard and unpromising. On them sat, Sunday after Sunday, at these services, constant, never-flagging, all the old women in the parish. It was a gruesome assemblage: toothless, rheumatic, afflicted with divers pains and infirmities, they yet

struggled, Sunday after Sunday, to the "free seats," so called by a bitter mockery, because those who sat in them had no other choice but to go.

On their regular attendance depended not so much their daily bread, which the workhouse might have given them, but their daily comforts; their tea and sugar; their wine if they were ill—and they always were ill; their blankets and their coals. Now, will it be believed that Dick, instigated by Ghrimes, who held the revolutionary maxim that religion, if it is to be real, ought not to be made a condition of charity, actually found out the names of these old trots, and made a weekly dole among them, without any conditions whatever? It was so. He really did it. After two or three Sundays the free seats were empty, all the old women having gone to different conventicles, where they got their religion, hot and hot, as they liked it; where they sat in comfortable pews, like the rest of the folk; and where they were treated as if, in the house of God, all men are alike and equal. When the curates called, they were cheeky; when they threatened, the misguided old ladies laughed; when they blustered, these backsliders, relying on their Dick, cracked their aged fingers in the young men's faces.

"He is a very dreadful man," said the rector. "What shall we do with him?"

He called. He explained the danger which befel these ignorant though elderly persons in frequenting an uncovenanted place of worship; but he spoke to deaf ears. Dick understood him not.

It was the time of the annual school feast. Dick was sitting in that exasperating Californian jacket in the little bank parlour, consecrated to black cloth and respectability. His legs were on the window sill, his mouth had a cigar in it, his face was beaming with jollity, his heart was as light as a child's. All this was very bad.

Foiled in his first attempt, the rector made a second.

"There is another matter, Mr. Mortiboy, on which I would speak with you."

"Speak, Mr. Lightwood," said Dick. "Don't ask me for any money for the missionaries."

"I will not," said good old Mr. Lightwood, mournfully. "I fear it would be of little use."

Dick pulled his beard and grinned. Why this universal tendency of mankind to laugh when, from a position of strength, they are about to do something disagreeable?

"It is not about any of our societies, Mr. Morti-

boy. But I would fain hope that you will not refuse a trifle to our children's school feast. We give them games, races, and so forth. With tea and cake. We are very short of funds."

"Do you?" cried Dick. "Look here, sir. What would you say if I offered to stand the whole thing —pay for the burst myself—grub, liquids, and prizes?"

The rector was dumbfoundered. It had hitherto been one of his annual difficulties to raise the money for his little *fête*, for St. Giles's parish was very large, and the parishioners generally poor. And here was a man offering to pay for everything!

Then Dick, who could never be a wholly submissive son of the Church, must needs put in a condition which spoiled it.

"All the children, mind. None of your Church children only."

"It has always been confined to our own children, Mr. Mortiboy. The Dissenters have their—ahem! their—their—treat at another time."

"Very well, then. Here is my offer. I will pay for the supper, or dinner, or whatever you call it, to as many Market Basing children as like to come. I don't care whether they are Jews or Christians. That is their look-out, not mine. Take my offer,

Mr. Lightwood. If you refuse, by Jove, I'll have a day of my own, and choose your day. We'll see who gets most youngsters. If you accept, you shall say grace, and do all the pious part yourself. Come, let us oblige each other. I am really sorry to refuse you so often; and here is a chance."

What was to be done with this dreadful man? If you crossed him, he was capable of ruining everything; and to yield to him was to give up half your dignity. But concession meant happiness to the children; and the good old clergyman, who could not possibly understand the attitude of mind of his new parishioner — seeing only perversity, where half was experience and half ignorance — yielded at once and gracefully.

Dick immediately assumed the whole conduct of the affair. Without making any reference to church or chapel, he issued handbills stating that sports, to which all the children in the place were invited, would be held on the following Wednesday, in his own paddock at Derngate. Then followed a goodly list of prizes to be run for, jumped for, wrestled for, and in other ways offered to public competition. And it became known that preparations were making on the most liberal scale. There was to be a dinner at one, a tea at five, and a

supper at eight. There were to be fireworks. Above all, the races and the prizes.

Dick had no notion of doing a thing by halves. He got an itinerant circus from a neighbouring fair, a wild beast show, a Punch and Judy, swing-boats, a roundabout, and a performing monkey. Then he hired a magic lantern, and erected a tent where it was to be seen all day. He hired donkeys for races, got hundreds of coloured lamps from town, built an enormous marquee where any number of children might sit down to dinner, and sent out messengers to ascertain how many guests might be expected.

This was the happiest period in Dick's life. The possessor of a princely income, the owner of an enormous fortune, he had but to lift his hand, and misery seemed to vanish. Justice, the propagation of prudential motives, religion, natural retribution for broken laws, all these are advanced ideas, of which Dick had but small conception.

Grace Heathcote described the day in one of her letters to Kate—those letters which were almost the only pleasure the poor girl had at this time :—

"As for the day, my dear, it was wonderful. I felt inclined to defend the climate of England at

the point of the sword—I mean the needle. Dick, of course, threw California in my teeth. As we drove down the road in the waggonette, the grand old trees in the park were rustling in their lovely July foliage like a great lady in her court dress. The simile was suggested to me by mamma, who wore her green silk. Lucy and I were dressed alike—in white muslin. I had pink ribbons, and she wore blue; and round my neck was the locket with F.'s portrait in it, which you sent me—you good, kind, thoughtful Kate! Mamma does not like to see it; but you know my rebellious disposition. And papa took it in his fingers, and then pinched my cheek, as much as to say that he highly approved of my conduct. Oh! I know the dear old man's heart. I talk to him out in the fields, and find out all his little secrets. Men, my dear Kate, even if they are your own father, are all as simple as—what shall I say?—as Frank and papa.

"We got into Market Basing at twelve. The town was just exactly like market day, only without the smell of vegetables. It felt like Christmas Day in the summer. You know the paddock? It is not very big, but it was big enough. The front lawn of Derngate—poor old Uncle Mortiboy inside, not knowing what was going on!—was

covered with a great marquee. The paddock had a racecourse marked round it, and a platform, and posts between, which were festooned with coloured lamps. All the children, in their Sunday best, were gathering about the place, waiting to be admitted.

"As we drove up, Dick came out, with a cigar between his teeth, of course, and the crowd gave a great cheer. Mamma said it seemed as if it was meant for us; and so we all got out of the waggonette, trying to look like princesses; and Dick helped us, and they all cheered again. Really, I felt *almost* like Royalty; which, my dear Kate, must be a state of life demanding a great strain upon the nerves, and a constant worry to know whether your bonnet is sitting properly.

"'Are we looking our best, Dick?' I asked, anxious to know.

"'Your very best,' he said. 'I take it as a compliment to my boys and girls.'

"I wish that woman Mary, our old servant, had not been standing close by. She gave me a look —such a look as I never had before—as if I was doing her some mortal injury; and then turned away, and I saw her no more all day. I declare there's always something. If ever I felt happy in

my life—except one day when Frank told me he loved me—it was last Wednesday; and that woman really spoiled at least an hour of the day for me, because she made me feel so uncomfortable. I wish she would go away.

"As one o'clock struck, the band—did I tell you there was a band? A real band, Kate, the militia band from the Stores—struck up 'The Roast Beef of Old England,' and Dick in five minutes had all the boys and girls in to dinner.

"The rector, and his curates, and the Dissenting ministers—and what the paper called 'a select company,' which means ourselves chiefly—were present. We all sat down: I next to Dick on his left hand, mamma on his right. The rector said grace. Dick whispered that we could not have too much Grace—his Californian way of expressing satisfaction at my personal appearance—and we began to eat and drink. Spare me the details.

"One p.m. to two p.m.: legs of mutton, and rounds of beef, and huge plum puddings.

"Two p.m. to three p.m.: the cherubs are all gorged, and lying about in lazy contentment, too happy to tease each other, and too lazy to do any mischief. Old Hester crying.

"'What for, Hester?'

"'Oh! miss, to think that Miss Susan never lived to see him come home again. And she so fond of him. And he so good and so kind.'

"Poor old Hester! She follows her boy, as she calls him, about with her eyes. I have even seen her stroke the tails of his coat when he wasn't looking. Do men ever know how fond women are of them? And Dick *is* kind and good. He really is, Kate.

"At three, the games. And here a most wonderful surprise. Who should drive up to the paddock but Lord Hunslope himself, and the countess —who always gives me a cold shiver—and Lord Launton? The earl marched straight up to us, and shook hands with papa.

"'Pray, Mr. Heathcote,' he said, in his lordliest way, 'introduce Mr. Mortiboy to me.'

"The Heathcotes had Parkside and Hunslope too before ever the Launtons had left their counters in the city; but of course we didn't insist on our superior rank at such a moment.

"Dick took off his hat with that curious pride of equality which comes, I suppose, of having estates in Mexico, and being able to throw the lasso. The countess shook hands with everybody; and Lord Launton, blushing horribly, dropped his

stick, and shook hands too, after he had picked it up. I am quite sure that if Lord Launton, when he becomes a peer, could only have the gas turned off before he begins to speak, he would be made Prime Minister in a week. As it is, poor young man——

"We all—I mean the aristocracy—stayed together the whole afternoon, bowing affably to our friends of a lower rank in life—the Battiscombe girls, and the Kerbys, and the rector's wife. I really do not know how I am to descend again. The earl made some most valuable remarks, which ought to be committed to writing for posterity. They may be found, though, scattered here and there about the pages of English literature. The curious may look for them. You see, 'Les esprits forts se rencontrent.'

"After the games, the earl gave away the prizes. I send you the local paper, giving an account of the proceedings. Little Stebbing, Mr. Battiscombe's clerk, was acting as reporter, and making an immense parade at a small table, which he brought himself. I never saw any one look so important. I spoke to him once.

"'Pray, miss,' he said, 'do not interrupt me. I

represent the Press. The Fourth Estate, miss. I'm afraid I shan't have enough flimsy.'

"Those were his very words, Kate. By flimsy, I learn that he meant writing paper. Do our great poets—does my adored Tennyson write on 'flimsy?' Then the Earl-ly party went away, and I made a pun, which you may guess; then we had tea; then we had dancing to the band on the platform—Dick waltzes like a German angel—and then we had supper. And then, O my dear Kate—alas! alas! such a disastrous termination to the evening—for Dick put his foot into all the proprieties. It was when they proposed his health. He hadn't fired pistols at anybody, or taken the name of the missionaries in vain, or worn a Panama hat, or done anything disgraceful at all. And now it was to come. My poor cousin Dick! How will he get over it?

"They proposed his health after supper. The children were simply intoxicated—not with beer, for they had none: only lemonade and sweet things—but with fun, fireworks, and fruit tart. They cheered till their dear little throats were hoarse. Even the ugliest, reddest-faced, turnedest-up nosed girl looked pretty when papa called on them to drink the health of the giver of the

feast. My own heart swelled, and Lucy cried outright.

"Then Dick got up. My dear, he looked simply grand in the flicker of the gas jets stirred about by the wind. He stood up, tall and strong, high up above us all, and passed his left hand down his long black beard. His brown eyes are so soft sometimes, too. They were soft now; and his under-lip has a way of trembling when he is moved. He was moved now. I can't remember all his speech. He began by telling the children that he was more happy to have them about him than they to come. Then he began good advice. No one knows how wise Dick is. He told them that what they wanted was fresh air, plenty of grub—his word, Kate, not mine—and not too many books. Here they all screamed, and the clergymen shook their precious heads. I said, 'Hear, hear,' and mamma touched me on my arm. It is wrong, of course, in a young lady to have any opinions at all which the male sex do not first instil into her tender mind. Then he called their attention to the fact that they were not always going to be children; and that, if they wanted plenty to eat, they would have to work hard for it. And then he said, impressively shaking an enormous great fist at them—

"'And now, my boys and girls, remember this. Don't you believe people who tell you to be contented with what you've got. That's all nonsense. *You've got to be discontented.* The world is full of good things for those who have the courage to get up and seize them. Look round in your houses, and see what you have: then look round in rich men's houses—say mine and the rector's—and see what We've got. Then be discontented with your own position till you're all rich too.'

"Here the rector rose, with a very red face.

"'I cannot listen to this, Mr. Mortiboy—I must not listen to it. You are undoing the Church's teaching.'

"'I've got nothing to do with the Church.'

"'You are attacking the Church's Catechism.'

"'Does the Catechism teach boys to be contented?'

"'It does, in explicit terms.'

"'Then the Catechism is a most immoral book.'

"Dick wagged his head solemnly.

"'Boys and girls, chuck the Catechism into the fire, and be discontented.'

"Here the rector solemnly left the tent, and everybody looked serious. Dick took no notice, and went on.

"I'll tell you a story. In an English town that I know, there were two boys and two girls. They were all four poor, like most of you. They grew up in their native place till they were eighteen and twenty, and the boys fell in love with the girls. One was a contented fellow. His father had been a farm labourer, like some of your fathers. He would go on being a farm labourer. The other read that the world was full of ground that only waited for a man to dig it up; and he went away. I saw him last year. He had been out for four years. He had a farm, my boys, stocked with cattle and horses, all his own. Think of that! And he had a wife, my girls; his old sweetheart, come out to marry him. Think of that! Then I came home. I saw the other boy, a farm labourer still! He was bent with rheumatism already, because he was a slave. He had no money: no home: no prospects. And the girl he was to have married—well, my girls, if your teachers are worth their salt, they'll tell you what became of that girl. Go out into the world, boys. Don't stick here, crowding out the place, and trying to be called gentlemen. What the devil do you want a black coat for till you have earned it? Go out into the beautiful places in the world, and learn what a man

is really worth. And now I hope you've all enjoyed yourselves. And so, good night."

"Oh! Kate, Kate!—here was a firebrand in our very midst. And people are going about, saying that Dick is an infidel. But they can't shake his popularity, for the town loves his very name."

Grace's letter was all true. Dick actually said it. It was his solitary public oration. It had a profound effect. In the half-lighted marquee, as the big-bearded man stood towering over the children, with his right arm waving them out into the world—where? No matter where: somewhere away: somewhere into the good places of the world—not a boy's heart but was stirred within him; and the brave old English blood rose in them as he spoke, in his deep bass tones, of the worth of a single man in those far-off lands;—an oration destined to bear fruit in after-days, when the lads, who talk yet with bated breath of the speech and the speaker, shall grow to man's estate.

"Dangerous, Dick," said Farmer John. "What should I do without my labourers?"

"Don't be afraid," said Dick. "There are not ten per cent. have the pluck to go. Let us help them, and you shall keep the rest."

CHAPTER THE NINTH.

WHEN Frank left Mr. Burls's shop, he felt that he had left it for good. It was Monday evening at five o'clock. He had received the money due to him for painting and restoring on Saturday evening as usual; therefore, all that the dealer owed him for was one day's work. This sum he determined to make Mr. Burls a present of. It was better they should not meet—at least, for the present, Frank thought. For the sake of earning money, he had borne for three months the coarse vulgarity and purse-proud insolence of Burls. He had felt that he should not be able to bear it much longer. The time had come. He had spoken the truth. The penalty was dismissal in anything but polite terms.

He had seen Burls kick a man out of his shop for an offence which, compared to what he had done, was a trifle light as air. He felt he could work for such a knave, but he could not condescend to fight with him. So he prudently resolved to keep away, and dismissed himself there and then.

It was not very likely that worthy old Dr. Perkins would be able to overtake Frank; for he was a stout gentleman of sixty, more accustomed to jog behind his cob along the white Holmshire roads than to run full pelt down a London street. Nor was his son-in-law of much assistance in the matter; for losing sight of his impulsive relative after the first few strides, and not catching a glimpse of Frank, he prudently devoted himself to the task of finding out where Dr. Perkins had disappeared to, and three or four minutes after found him making the most profuse apologies to a buxom lady he had nearly upset in turning the corner of the street. They did not return to Mr. Burls's shop; but, calling a four-wheeler, drove to their hotel.

"I shall communicate at once with that young man's friends," said this excellent old clergyman, as soon as he had recovered his breath. "I am shocked and grieved to see him wandering about like a child of Ishmael in this wilderness of houses.

It would kill me. Only think of a young fellow brought up as he was, being reduced to such a pass! Nobody blames his unfortunate father now. There are plenty to help him and his poor dear mother and sister, and he shall be put in a way of doing something for himself without a day's delay."

It was not to be surprised at that Frank was not overtaken by the friends who pursued him, for he had turned up a court—entered by a low archway, with shops on each side of it—while they had shot past it, keeping on their way straight down the street. In this court, at a comfortable eating-house, Frank was in the habit of taking his meals. He had his pot of tea, bread and butter, and watercresses, read the evening paper as usual, and started to walk home to his lodgings at Islington, just as the two gentlemen, who would have given almost anything to know where he was, were sitting down to their dinner at the Tavistock in Covent-garden.

"It must have come to this very soon," he thought, as he walked homewards; but he felt rather down at being again a man without an employment. "I couldn't have stood his company much longer. But I am such an unlucky beggar: if it had happened a fortnight ago, or a

week or two hence, I should not have owed that confounded landlady anything."

The truth was, ever since Frank had been in Mr. Burls's employment, he had sent as much money as he could possibly scrape together by post-office order to his mother and sister, living in a farmhouse in the romantic village of Llan-y-Fyddloes. Their little income of two pounds a-week was quite enough for their modest wants there, Kate often told him, in her weekly letter—a chronicle of small beer Frank looked forward to on a Monday morning with a feverish longing; for did it not always contain a letter from Grace, his love, to her dear friend Kate, which Mistress Kate enclosed for him to read, but which he never, on one single occasion, sent back in his next, as Kate invariably desired him to do? But Frank knew, though the money would not be spent, it would cheer his mother—and, for the matter of that, Kate too. They would have the strongest possible proof that he was getting on in the world. He had more than he wanted for himself, and could contribute to their support; and he wrote very flourishing accounts of how he was selling his works, and Kate would perceive how necessary it was for him to see Hampstead, and Highgate, and

Richmond, and other of those charming suburbs of London, to fill his sketch-book with pretty bits; so she was to consider him a gipsy student of art, now camping here, now there, not tied to any spot above a week or so, roaming at his royal pleasure in search of the Picturesque. And so letters to him, to avoid delays, had better be addressed to a certain post-office, for Francis Melliship, Esquire, till called for; and as he was in London very often, he would always call when he expected a letter from her or from his mother, and they were the only people he wrote to now.

Not one word of the drudgery in Burls's manufactory of the sham antique; not one word of the dingy lodging in the back street; not one word of the groans of the lover's heart at the hopeless distance that still lay between Frank Melliship and Grace Heathcote.

In his letters, all was rose-coloured.

"Do you know, I really think Frank will do well, Kate," Mrs. Melliship said. "It is plain he is getting on with his pictures. I wish he had not so much boyish pride."

"Mamma, Frank is independent. He relies on himself, as a man should. I admire him for it."

"Well, my dear, I never heard of an artist that was what I call well off who wasn't an R.A. Who was that R.A. your father used to invite to stay with us?—the man that used to stop the carriage while he sketched things—dear me, I know it quite well! And when Frank could be an R.A., if he could get on as fast as possible, I don't really quite know—though it must be some years, of course. But he is certainly doing well, for he has sent us ten pounds twice within a month. No, I am wrong—five weeks. He is a dear, good boy; and I feel our misfortune more for him, Kate, than for you and me. Oh, dear! they all know it wasn't your poor father's fault at all; and I'm sure John Heathcote, besides many others I could mention, would do anything in the world for Frank. I suppose, poor boy, he has set his heart on Grace?"

"Yes," said Kate, demurely.

"Well, I always loved Grace and Lucy very much, and I could treat her as a daughter, and I should like to see Frank married and happy. I've heard your poor father say very often that John Heathcote could settle a handsome sum on his daughters when they married; and Kate, my dear, I think we ought to know Frank's address in Lon-

don, and give it to friends who want to help him, and are always writing to me about it. A letter left at a post-office always reminds me so of Florence, where I was so miserable, because my dear mother died there; and we did not always get the letters that we had no reasonable doubt were posted to us—long before I married your poor father, Kate."

"Yes, mamma," Kate said, mechanically.

Her mother would run on for an hour, from subject to subject; and Kate often was thinking of something else, and only spoke when her mother came to a stop. Mrs. Melliship proceeded—

"I certainly like this village, though the name, and, for the matter of that, the people are very outlandish; and I should not care to go back to Market Basing, Kate, unless I could have my carriage. We used to visit people such a distance in the country, and we could not well do it without a carriage."

"Oh, don't let us go back to Market Basing, mamma. I like Wales so much."

"Well, my dear, I shall live wherever you wish me to, for I may say I live now entirely for you and Frank."

Here the simple lady took out her handkerchief,

and shed a few tears—a termination to her speeches more common than not.

Then the two women kissed and comforted each other; and Kate found a book to amuse her mother.

Frank was in the habit of working an hour or two by gaslight of an evening, with pencil or crayons; but he was rather disgusted with art that night, and looked round his little sitting-room in a gloomy mood.

"Ah!" he said, "if people who must have pictures for their houses would only buy an honest new picture instead of a spurious old one, artists might live. After all, the worst of our works are better than what they do buy: they are what they appear. Why not go to the exhibitions, and buy some of the unsold pictures there? Or come to a fellow's place? We're poor enough to be modest in our charges. But they will have real Old Masters at ten pounds a-piece; and there the dealers beat us. Art! There is no feeling for art in England—no desire to encourage artists of any kind. They're only a lowish sort of fellows. And then the beggars must go to dealers to buy their ancestors!"

He laughed savagely, and stuck the end of his brush through a half-finished sketch on paper.

"I wonder who'll paint Burls's genuine old pictures now; and dodge up the rubbish from the sales, and clean, and tone, and line, and varnish, and crack? What humbug it all is!"

There was a knock at his door, and his landlady's grubby little daughter gave him a note written on a sheet of paper, and enclosed in an envelope she had ten minutes before sent the young lady out to purchase for a halfpenny at the shop round the corner.

The corner bore the family impress—a dirty finger and thumb they put on everything they touched.

Frank laughed. He never could be surly with a child in his life.

"Tell your mother I'll see her before I go out in the morning."

He owed two pounds four and sixpence for rent and commodities supplied, and he had only sixteen and sixpence to pay it with; which, under all the circumstances of the case, was awkward.

What wonders a good night's rest will effect!

In the morning, Frank paid his landlady ten shillings on account, listened to her impertinence

without a reply, and quietly told her to let his lodgings, and keep his portmanteau for security till he paid her. He should not come back again, except to fetch away his things.

He had dressed himself in a new suit of clothes he had ordered on the strength of his successful manufacture of Old Cromes and other masters. Nothing could make Frank look other than a gentleman; but to-day he looked quite like his old self of six months ago. He was not at all miserable; on the contrary, he felt quite happy and cheerful.

To be sure, it was a bright day—not too warm—when merely to breathe is a pleasure, even if you are a convict in Portland. Besides, he was free from a drudgery at which his soul had always revolted.

"But what next?" he asked himself. "Anyhow, I've done with painting. No more oils for me."

Passing a pawnbroker's as he spoke, he went in, for the first time in his life, and asked how much the man would advance on his watch and chain. He thanked the man for his information, and left the shop with his watch in his pocket.

"By Jove!" he said, "here's a new source of wealth. I can pawn everything by degrees."

Then he strolled westwards.

The omnibuses had blue and white posters on them—"To Lord's Cricket Ground."

"Why, it's the Oxford and Cambridge match to-day."

Without stopping to think twice, he jumped on an omnibus.

"Why shouldn't I go? I can stick myself somewhere out of sight. I wonder how many of our Eleven I know."

He counted them on his fingers. He wanted to see and yet not be seen.

Just as he was getting off the seat he had occupied by the driver's side, a carriage passed by. Lord Launton was in it, with the countess and two other ladies.

Frank saw the danger he should run of seeing a number of old and inquisitive acquaintances.

He hesitated a moment in the dusty road.

"No—it's nothing to me. I've no interest in it now. I won't go in. Besides, it's half-a-crown, I think."

He took the footway, and set his face towards Regent's Park.

He had not walked a dozen steps when an immense hand and arm were linked in his. He felt a friendly pull towards some great figure; and, looking up, was astonished beyond measure to see himself arm-in-arm with his cousin, Dick Mortiboy.

"Frank, old man!" cried Dick, crushing Frank's hand in his cordial grasp, "I would have given fifty pounds to find you, and here you are. I saw you getting off the 'bus."

Frank was surprised, and a little annoyed.

"After all, I've got no quarrel with Dick," he thought; and his face cleared, and he returned his cousin's salute.

Dick Mortiboy was accompanied by a thin, pale-faced man, slight and foreign-looking.

"Lafleur—my cousin Frank," said Dick, introducing him.

"Fool of an Englishman," thought Lafleur, staring at Frank's bright, handsome face. "I leave you with your cousin. The cricket is not a game I care to waste time over," said he, softly. "We shall meet to-morrow, Dick. You will let me go now."

"To-morrow, at eleven. My old partner, Frank. Many is the jovial day we have had together."

"I don't like his looks."

"Insular prejudice, my cousin. Why have you never sent me your address, as you promised? Do you not know what has happened? The governor has got a stroke, and I've got all the money. We've all been trying to find you out. And here you are. I shan't let you go again in a hurry, I promise you."

He looked Frank up and down.

"Dressed fit for Broadway. Come on in."

Dick paid for two at the gate, and they were on the ground.

Dick watched the match with great earnestness. He was a splendid hand at games of skill himself. He knew nobody, nobody knew him. But his height, his splendid beard and brown face, and his careless dress, attracted observation. He only wanted people to bet with on the match to make him happy.

Frank saw lots of old friends.

They asked him his address.

"Only in town for a few days," he said, with an airy laugh.

At length Dick got tired of it.

"Come on, old man. I've had enough, if you have. Let's go."

At the gates, as they went out, stood a man who had been Frank's greatest friend at college. They had rowed together, driven to Newmarket together, got plucked together, written to each other until the smash came.

"Frank, by gad!" cried the man, running down the steps. "Shake hands, old fellow. And how are you? And what are you doing? Tell me you've got over your troubles. I heard all about it."

It was like a burst of sunshine, after the wretched time of the last few months, to find men who were glad to shake hands with him.

Frank tried to laugh; but his mirth was rather a hollow thing.

"I'm well, you see, Evelyn. That is, I'm not starving yet. But there's no money, and I'm still in a parenthetical stage of life."

"You know my address, Frank—give me yours. Let me help you, for old times' sake."

"Thank you, my dear Evelyn. It's like you to make the offer. Good-bye. I'll give you an address—when I've got one."

He left him, and walked quickly away on Dick's arm. He could not bear to let anybody help him with money. And yet Evelyn was longing to give his old friend help.

What is there in this word money, that I may neither give it nor take it? Why should I be degraded if a man slips a sovereign in my hand? Sovereigns are not plentiful. I should like the money. I am not degraded if a man leaves me a legacy of many sovereigns.

"Come," said Dick Mortiboy to Frank, when they had got out of their Hansom in Piccadilly, "you are not engaged to-night. Come and dine with me. After dinner we will talk. I hate talking before. Let us have a game at billiards first."

He led the way to a public room near Jermyn-street. There were two or three men idly knocking the balls about. Dick took up a cue and made a stroke, missing it.

"Will you play fifty or a hundred up, Frank?"

"I play very badly. I am quite out of practice."

"Well, let it be fifty then," said Dick.

The room was one of bad repute. It was frequented by sharpers. There were three in the room—of course, perfect strangers to one another.

Dick Mortiboy didn't know the character of the room he was in, and didn't care. He could give an account of himself anywhere. For his part, Frank

had not played a game at billiards since he left Market Basing.

He was not amusement for Dick, for he played like a man wholly out of practice.

The gentlemen in the room became interested in the first fifty up between Dick and Frank, and one bet another a wager of half-a crown on the result.

Dick won, and the loser offered to bet again, if the tall gentleman gave the other points. Dick did give points. The man—whom the marker called "Captain"—then offered to bet Dick Mortiboy half-a-crown his friend beat him. Dick took the bet, won it, and pocketed the half-crown. He was going to play another game with Frank, but was stopped by the marker.

"This is a public table, sir. Two fifty games, or one hundred, between the same players; then another gentleman has the table, if he likes to take it."

Dick was a little annoyed, but gave way.

"Should you like to play a game, sir?" said the marker to the man he had called Captain.

The fellow was a seedy swell, in clothes that had been fast twelve months ago, but now were well worn. His hat and boots showed signs of poverty.

"I should; but I don't wish to prevent these

gentlemen from playing, I'm sure. I'll give way; but, really, I can't stay many minutes."

"Well, perhaps the gentleman that won will play a game with you—if you don't mind playing the winner?" the marker said.

"All right," said Dick, and pulled off his coat.

The Captain played badly: so did Dick.

Both were playing dark.

"Twenty all" was called.

"Shall we have a crown on, sir, to 'liven the game?" said the stranger.

"I'll back myself for a sovereign," said Dick.

"I don't often play for a sovereign a game," said the Captain; "but I don't mind doing it for once."

When Spot (the stranger) was forty, Plain (Dick) was only thirty-five.

"Make it a hundred up, sir, and have another sov on," said Spot.

"Done," said Plain.

Dick had bets, too, with the other two strangers and the marker.

At the end of the game, he had four pounds five shillings to pay.

Frank spoke his suspicions, in a low tone, before this game was finished.

Dick only nodded: he had seen they were common sharpers from the moment he entered the room.

"I'll let them have it," he said.

They played another game—Frank watching Dick's play. Up to the time the marker cried "sixty—seventy-two," Dick was behind generally about a dozen. His bets amounted to nearly twenty pounds with the three men.

Up to sixty he had played in a slovenly manner. At that point he took up his cue, and scored out in two breaks.

His play was superb. He was within a few points in a hundred of the best professional form. One of the men was going to leave the room. Dick called him back, and promised to finish the game in three minutes, and did it.

He asked the Captain if he would like another game?

"Not with a professional sharp. Though who you are, I don't know."

"You'll pay up then, gentlemen?" asked Dick.

One of the other men whispered the Captain.

"My friend suggests that it would be well if you were to give your name, sir. It is not usual to see men play in your fashion. You have sharped us,

sir—sharped us. Give us your name and address —we are not going to part."

"Now, Captain," said Dick, "you've been licked, and licked easy. You may take it fighting, or you may take it quiet. Which shall it be?"

"Come on, Tom, don't let him bustle us out of it," said the Captain; "I'll take it fighting."

There were four altogether, with the marker. They made a rush on Dick. Frank, not unmindful of Eton days, took them in flank, while Dick received them in front.

They had not the ghost of a chance. It was a mere affair of fists—a sort of light skirmish, which warmed up Dick's blood, and made him rejoice once more, like a Berserker, in the battle. And, after three minutes, the four fell back, and the cousins stood, with their backs against the wall, laughing.

"And now," said Dick, "open the door, Frank."

He stepped forward, seized the marker, who was foremost, by the coat-collar, and bore him swiftly to the door—the others not interfering. There was a great crash of breaking bannisters. The marker had been thrown down the stairs.

"Don't let us fight with servants," said Dick;

"let us have it out like gentlemen. Now then, Captain, we're all ready again."

"Let us go," said the Captain, with a pale face, handing Dick the money. "You have sharped and bustled us, and you want to bully us."

"You shall go when you have apologized to me, Captain—not before. You other two, get out."

He looked so fierce, and was undoubtedly so heavy about the fist, that the other two, taking their hats, departed swiftly, with such dignity as their wounds allowed.

"Now, Captain, let us two have a little explanation. I like rooking the rooks. I go about doing it. Beg my pardon, sir, or I'll spoil your play, too, for a month of Sundays."

He seized the poor billiard-player by the collar, and shook him as if he had been a child.

"You may do what you like," said the man. "You have got every farthing I have in the world, and my little child's ill; but I'm hanged if I beg your pardon."

"Dick, Dick," said Frank, "give him back his money."

But, at the sight of the man's misery, Dick's wrath had suddenly vanished.

"Poor devil!" he said. "I've had some bad

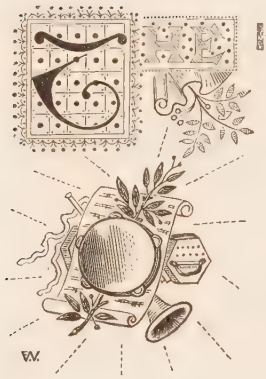
times myself, mate, out in the States. Look here —here's your money, and something for the little one. And I say, Captain, if you see me drawing the rooks anywhere else, don't blow on me. Good-bye. Come, Frank, let us go and dine. What a good thing a scrimmage is to give one an appetite. I do like a regular British row," said Dick, with a sigh; "and one so seldom gets one. Now, over the water, somebody always lets fly a Deringer, or pulls out a bowie, and then the fun's spoiled. You've got a clean style, Frank—very clean and finished. I thought we were in for it when I saw the place; so I went on. I was determined you should enjoy yourself thoroughly, old boy."

They had dinner, and talked. Dick's talk was all the same thing. It said—

"Take my money. Let me help you. Let me give. I am rich. I like to give."

Frank, with a proud air, put him off, and made him talk of anything but him and his affairs.

CHAPTER THE TENTH.



STREET, as Frank stepped into it from Dick's hotel, was alive with people, for the night was warm and fine. He bade his rich cousin good night, in his easy pleasant way, never hinting at the sore straits to which he was reduced. Dick was rather inclined to believe, indeed, from what little information he was able to elicit from Frank, that Art paid ;—that Frank got a living at it, at all events, and was too proud to be helped when he saw the chance of doing well without help. Now,

Dick rather admired this phase of Frank's character—as who would not? Yet he resolved that, when he saw him the next day, he would compel him to disclose the state of his finances and his prospects. While one cousin thought this, the other hesitated a moment in front of the hotel, remembering suddenly that he had no bed to go to. It was a curious sensation, the most novel he had ever experienced. No bed. Nowhere to go to. No money, or next to none, in his pocket. Nothing at all resembling a home. Even a portable tent, or a Rob Roy canoe, would have been something. He shook himself all over, like a dog. Then he laughed, for he had had a capital day, and a good dinner, and he was only five and twenty.

"Hang it," he said, "a night in the open won't kill one, I suppose. Dick Mortiboy must have had many in his travelling days."

Then he lit a cigar. Dick had forced a dozen upon him—which, with that curious feeling that permits a man to take anything except money from another, Frank accepted with real gratitude. With his hands in his pockets, and his hat well back on his head, as all old Eton boys wear it, he strolled westward, turning things over in his mind in that resignedly amused frame of mind which comes

upon the most unhappy wight after a bottle and a-half of claret. Our ancestors, in their kindly brutality, permitted condemned criminals to have a long drink on the way to Tyburn. The punch-bowl was brought out somewhere near the site of the Marble Arch ; and the condamné, fortified and brightened up by the drink, ascended the ladder with a jaunty air, and kicked off his shoes before an admiring populace ;—just as well, it seems to me, as keeping the poor wretch low, and making him feel all his misery up to the very last. Frank, having had his bowl of punch, was about to embark upon that wild and hopeless voyage of despair, which consists in sailing from port to port, looking for employment and finding none. There are certain ships to be met with in the different havens of the world, which are from time to time to be found putting in, "seeking." They never find. From Valparaiso they go to Rio ; from Pernambuco to Port Louis : from Calcutta to Kingston ; from Havana to Shanghai. They are always roving about the ocean, always "seeking," and always in ballast. Who are their owners ; how the grizzled old skipper keeps his crew together ; how they pay for the pickled pork and rum in which they delight ; how they have credit for repairs to rigging and

sails; how the ship is docked, and scraped, and kept afloat—all these things are a profound mystery. After a time, as I have reason for believing, they disappear; but this must be when there is no longer any credit possible, and all the ports in the world are closed to them. Probably at this juncture the skipper calls together his men, makes the weather-beaten tars a speech, tells them that their long and happy voyages must now terminate, because there is no more pickled pork and no more rum, and discloses to them a long-hidden secret. They cheer feebly, set the sails once more, turn her head due North, and steer away to that warm, windless, iceless ocean at the North Pole, where all vagrom ships betake themselves at last, and live together in peace and harmony far from the storms of the world.

Which things are an allegory. Ships are but as men. The North Pole ocean is as that hidden deep where dwell the men who have "gone under." They "go under" every day, falling off at each reverse more and more from the paths of honesty. One of them called on me a week ago. I had met him once, and only once, at Oxford, years since. He shook hands with me as with his oldest and best friend; he sat down; he drank my sherry; he

called me old fellow; and presently, when he thought my heart was open to the soft influence of pity, he told me his tale, and—borrowed thirty shillings. He went away. Of course, I found that his tale was all a lie. He is welcome to his thirty shillings, with which I have earned the right of shutting my door in the face of a man who has gone under.

Was Frank thinking of all this as he walked through the squares that clear, bright night, among the houses lit up for balls, and the carriages bearing their precious treasures of dainty women? I know not. The thoughts of a man who has but six and sixpence in his pocket, and no bed to go to, are like a child's. They are long, long thoughts. If it is cold and rainy, if he is hungry or ill, he despairs and blasphemes. If it is bright and warm, if he is well-fed and young, he laughs and sings, with a secret, half-felt sinking of the heart, and a looking forward to evil times close at hand.

Along the squares, outside the great houses—where the rich—and therefore happy, were dancing and feasting, thinking little enough (why should they?) about the poor, and therefore miserable, outside—beggars came up to Frank. One old man, who looked as if he had been a gentleman, stood in front of him suddenly.

"Give me something," he said, bringing his clenched fists down at his sides in a gesture of despair. "Give me something. I am desperately poor."

Frank put sixpence into his hand and passed on.

"Only six shillings left now," he thought.

Women—those dreadful women, all alike, who belong to certain districts of London, and appear only late at night—begged of him. These women apparently form a class peculiar to themselves. They are neither old nor young. They carry a baby. They are dressed in rusty black. They bear in one hand three boxes of cigar lights. They address you as "good gentleman," and claim to have six starving babies at home, and nothing to put in their mouths. Then the boys with cigar lights ran after him; and then more sturdy beggars, more women, and more boys.

He walked on. It struck ten. Frank's cigar was finished. Just then he passed—it was in one of those dingy, characterless streets, near the great squares —· a low-browed, retiring-looking public house. From its doors issued the refrain of a song, the clinking of glasses, and stamping of feet. Frank stopped.

"I've got exactly six shillings," he said. "I may surely have a glass of beer out of that."

He went in and drank his glass. As he drank it, another song, horribly sung, began in the room behind the bar.

"Like to go in, sir?" asked the barmaid. "It's quite full. We hold it every Monday evening."

Frank thought he might as well sit down, and see what was going on — particularly as there appeared to be no charge for admission.

It was a long, low room at the back, filled with about thirty men, chiefly petty tradesmen of the neighbourhood. Every man was smoking a long clay pipe, and had a tumbler before him. Every man was perfectly sober, and wore an air of solemnity exceedingly comic. One of the men—the most solemn and the most comic—occupied the chair. By his right stood a piano, where a pale-faced boy of eighteen or so was playing accompaniments to the songs. A gentleman with a red face and white hair was sitting well back in his chair, holding his pipe straight out before him, chanting with tremendous emphasis and some difficulty—because he was short of breath. This, and not an imperfect education, caused him to accentuate his aspirates more strongly than was actually required :—

"Ho! the ma-haids of me-herry Hengle-land,
How be-hew-ti-ful hare they!"

Somewhat apart from the rest, not at the table —as if he did not belong to them—sat a man of entirely different appearance. He was gorgeously attired in a brown velvet coat and white waistcoat, with a great profusion of gold chain and studs. He was about five and forty years of age. His features were highly Jewish, with the full lips and large nose of that Semitic race. His hair, thick and black, lay in massive rolls on an enormous great head—the biggest head, Frank thought, that he had ever seen. In his hand, big in proportion, was a tumbler of iced soda and brandy. He was smoking a cigar, and beating time impatiently on the arm of his chair.

Frank sat modestly beside him, and ordered another glass of beer.

"Know this place, sir?" asked the man with the big head, turning to him.

"Never saw it before," said Frank.

"No more did I. Queer crib, isn't it? I turned in by accident, because I was thirsty. They'll ask you to sing directly. Do, if you can."

The "Maids of Merry England" died away in the last bars which those who were behind time

added to the original melody; and the chairman, taking up his tumbler, bowed to the singer, and said solemnly—

"Mr. Pipkin, sir, your health and song."

The company all did the same. Mr. Pipkin wiped his brow, and took a long pull at his gin and water.

"Now," said the chairman, persuasively, "who is going to oblige the company with the next song?"

Dead silence.

"Perhaps one of the visitors"—here he looked at Frank—"will oblige us?"

"If you can sing, do," growled Bighead.

"Really," said Frank, "I am afraid I hardly know any song that would please; but, if you like, I will sing a little thing I made myself once, words and music too."

"Hear, hear!" said the chair. "Silence, if you please, gentlemen, for the gentleman's song. Gentlemen, the gentleman written it himself."

Frank took the place of the pale-cheeked musician, and played his prelude. He was going to sing a song which he made at Cambridge, and used to sing at wines and suppers.

"It's only a very little thing," he said, address-

ing the audience generally. "If you don't like it, pray stop me at the first verse. It never had a name."

"There was Kate, with an eye like a hawk ;
There was Blanche, with an eye like a fawn ;
There was Fanny, as fresh as the rose on its stalk ;
And Annie, as bright as the dawn.
There were Polly, and Dolly, and Jessie, and Rose,
They were fair, they were dark, they were short, they were tall ;
I changed like a weathercock when the wind blows,
For I loved them all—and I loved them all.

"Like the showers and sunshine of spring,
The quarrels and kisses I had ;
Like a forest-bird fledgeling trying its wing,
Is the flight of the heart of a lad.
Oh ! Annie and Fanny, and Jessie and Kate,
How love vows perish, and promises fall !
You were all pledged to me, and I wasn't your fate ;
But I loved you all—and I loved you all.

"'Twas Annie I kissed in the wood,
And Fanny kissed me in the lane ;
But Rosie held out, as a young maiden should,
Till she found I'd not ask her again.
Now they're married, and mothers, and all,
And 'tis Lucy clings close to my breast ;
And we never tell her, what we never recall—
For I love my wife—how I loved the rest."

"Bravo!" growled the man with the big head. "Bravo! young fellow. Devilish well sung."

"Sir," said the chairman, "your health and song."

"Don't get up," said Bighead; "sing another. Look here, sing that. Mr. Chairman, the gentleman's going to sing another song."

It was "Adelaïde," that supreme tenor song—the song of songs—that the man handed to Frank. He took it from a portfolio which was standing beside him.

"Yes," he said, nodding, "I'm a sort of professional, and I know a good voice when I hear it. Can you play the accompaniment? If not, I will."

Frank yielded him the seat, and took the music. Yes, he could sing "Adelaïde." But how long since he sang it last! And—ah me!—in what altered circumstances!

But he sang. With all the sweetness and power of his voice he filled the room—laden with the air of so many pipes and reeking tumblers—with the yearnings of passion, which have never found such utterance as in this great song. The honest folk behind their pipes sat in amazement, half comprehending—but only half. The barmaid crept from

behind the counter to the door, and listened: when the song was finished, she went back with tears in her eyes, and a throbbing heart. She was not too old to feel the yearning after love. The pale-faced young musician listened till his cheeks glowed and his eyes brightened: the poor boy had dreams beyond his miserable surroundings. The player—the big-headed man—as he played, wagged his head, and shook his curls, and let the tears roll down his great big nose, and drop upon the keys. For Frank, forgetting where he was, and remembering his love, and how he sang that song last to her, poured out his heart into the notes, and sang as one inspired.

"Come with me," said Bighead, seizing him by the arm as soon as he had finished. "Come away. Let us talk, you and I—let us talk."

He dragged him into the street. The clocks were striking twelve.

"Which is your way?"

"Which is yours?" said Frank.

The man moved his fat forefinger slowly round his head in a complete circle.

"All ways," he said. "Let me walk part of your way."

Frank turned to the left. It mattered nothing.

"Are you rich?—you are a gentleman, I see—but are you rich, happy, satisfied, contented, money in your pocket, money in the bank, therefore virtuous and respected?"

"No—I am none of these things."

"Then make yourself all these. Sing for money. Go on the stage. Good God, man!—Giuglini himself had not so sweet a voice. Give me your name and address." Frank hesitated. "Well, then, take mine." He gave him a card. "Will you come and see me? That can do you no harm, you know. Come."

"Candidly," said Frank, "I am looking for employment. But I would rather not sing for money."

"Rubbish! *I've* done it. *I've* sung second basso at the Italian Opera. Not sing for money! Why not? You'd write for money, I suppose? You'd paint for money? Why not sing? Now, come and pay me a visit, and talk it over."

"I must look about first. Are you really serious?"

"Quite. I don't care how it is you've got into a hole—whether it's money, or what it is. On the boards, nobody cares much."

"You are quite welcome to know everything, so far as I am concerned," said Frank, proudly.

"So much the better. Then no offence. When will you come?"

"I will look for occupation to-morrow. If I don't get it, I will call on you in the afternoon."

"To-morrow. Good. Of course you won't get anything to do. How should you? Nobody ever gets anything to do. Good night, my dear sir. For heaven's sake, take care of your throat. Do wrap it up. Let me lend you a wrapper."

He took a clean red silk handkerchief out of his pocket, unfolded it, and wrapped it round Frank's throat, tenderly and softly. In the eyes of the big-headed man, Frank's voice was a fortune.

"Good heavens! if anything were to happen to an organ like that from exposure! Are you going to smoke again? Then take one of my cigars—they must be better than yours."

"Mine are good enough, I think," said Frank, laughing, offering him one.

"Let me look—let me look. Yes, they're very fair. Don't smoke too much. And—and—" here he held out his hand—"Good-bye—good-bye. Mind you come to see me. For heaven's sake, take care."

He strode away, leaving his red silk handkerchief round Frank's neck; and presently Frank heard him hail a Hansom in stentorian tones, and drive off. Then he was left alone, and began to feel a little cold, as if the weather had suddenly changed.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

HALF-PAST twelve. The air of the streets is close and stifling. The Mall, St. James's Park, is still crowded. No wonder; for the air of the park is fresh, and the moonlight lies soft and bright on the trees. Frank slowly descends the steps at the Duke of York's column, and proceeds to search for a resting-place. All the seats—he counted them as he went along, forty—appear to be full, some of them occupied by men stretched at full length, others by women sitting two and three together. All the way to Buckingham Palace there is not a single chance even of sitting room.

"Very odd," said Frank, returning, "that the same idea should strike all these people as well as myself. What is to be done next?"

The problem solved itself as he came to the next seat, where a man was lying at full length. He suddenly rolled round, and came with a heavy thud on the gravel. Picking himself up, he staggered to where Frank was standing.

"I shay, old f'l'r—don't take that place, be-because it's going round."

Then he disappeared.

Frank sat down, and, stretching his legs on the wood, pulled his hat over his eyes, and tried to go to sleep.

It was of no use. Just as he was dropping off a cab would come by. People talked as they walked past. A breath of the night air touched his cheek, and reminded him that he was not in bed. Besides, the bench was as hard as a third-class railway carriage. Even to an old campaigner, wood makes a poor substitute for a spring mattress.

"Hang these knots," said Frank, as the clock struck one. "I had no idea that knots were so much harder than common wood."

He shifted his position, and tried to persuade himself that he was getting sleepy.

"Adversity," he murmured, "makes one acquainted with strange beds. The advantage of the situation is, that one is not afraid of fleas."

A caterpillar fell upon his nose.

He sat up in disgust.

"Alternative. We may have caterpillars if we lie under a tree, or we may be watered by the fresh dew from Heaven if we take a bench outside a tree. Which shall we do? Let us consider."

He lay back, and fell asleep.

Five minutes after he lost consciousness, he was awakened by something touching his feet. He started up from a dream of soft couches.

"I beg a thousand pardons," said a soft voice. "I thought there was room for two."

The speaker, as the half light of a summer night, not to speak of the gas, showed him, was a tall and rather handsome man of thirty or so, dressed in a frock coat. Frank noticed at once that the heels of his boots, as the lamp shone on them, were worn to the stumps. Further investigation showed that there were no signs of collar or shirt, and that his hat, as he took it off with a polite wave, was limp at the brim. By daylight, what appeared now as glossiness, would have shown as grease; but this it was impossible to tell by the moonlight.

"I dare say there's room for two," said Frank, "if we economize legs."

The stranger gravely took his place, and they

divided the space so as to admit of four legs, all rather longer than the average.

"Do you a—often—use this place?" inquired the stranger."

"No," said Frank, with a laugh, half in bitterness. "This is the first time that I have tried the hotel. Perhaps it will not be the last. I find it draughty—exposed, perhaps, in situation. No doubt, extremely healthy."

"Ah!" said the other, with a ready sympathy. "You have, however, let me assure you, the very best bench, for a warm night, in the whole park. Are you sleepy, sir?"

"Not very. Who the devil can sleep here?"

"When you are used to it, it is really not bad for two or three months in the year. If I only had some tobacco, I should be quite comfortable."

"Take a cigar. I've got a few left."

He pulled out his case, and handed it to his newly made acquaintance.

"A thousand thanks. When I was in the 4th Buffs—you've heard of that regiment?—I used to buy my cigars at Hudson's. I've got to smoke shag now, and can't always get that. A capital cigar. I'm *very* much obliged to you, sir—very—much—obliged—indeed. A very good cigar. If

you were to keep them for a year in tea, you would find them ripen better, perhaps. But a very good cigar. I suppose you are——hard up?"

"Yes. Most of the visitors at this caravanserai are, I presume."

"In the service?"

"No."

"Ah! Excuse my impertinence. Well, I had my fling, and here I am. What does it matter to a philosopher?"

A slouching figure came by, apparently clad in the cast-off rags of some field scarecrow. He stopped before Frank's new friend.

"Night, Major."

"Good night to you, Jacob," said the other, with a patronizing air. "Things been going pretty well to-day?"

"No, dam bad. Here's your sixpence, Major."

He handed over the amount in coppers, lay down on the gravel, with his head on his arm, and in a moment was sound asleep, and snoring heavily.

"A humble retainer of mine," said the Major. "A follower, rather than a servant. Poor, as you see, but faithful. He does odd jobs for me, and I keep him going. Not a gentleman, you observe."

Frank laughed silently.

"It's a glorious thing, a good fling," said the Major. "Though it's ten years since I had mine, and it only lasted two years, I remember every day of it. You remember Kitty Nelaton, of the Adelphi?"

"No. Never had the pleasure of her acquaintance."

"A splendid woman. That, of course, was allowed. I took her, sir, from the Duke of Brentwood. His Grace nearly went mad with rage. Ah, I think I see myself now, tooling down to Richmond the loveliest pair of grays, I suppose, that ever were seen. But she was so devilish expensive. And I had a good year, too: got on the right thing for the Derby, landed at Ascot and Goodwood, and didn't do badly at Newmarket. Shall I tell you the story of my misfortunes?"

"Do," said Frank—"if it will not bore you."

"Not at all. It's a pleasure to talk to a gentleman; and besides, this is a capital cigar. It's ten years ago. Some of the other men have gone to grief, too; so that I'm not without companions. We meet sometimes, and have a talk over old times. Odd thing life is. If I could put all my experiences in a book, sir, by gad you'd be astonished. The revelations I could make about paper,

for instance; the little transactions in horse-flesh—eh? and other kinds of—"

"I beg your pardon," said Frank, who had dropped off to sleep, and was awakened by his head nearly nodding him off the bench. "You were saying—"

"Let me begin at the beginning," said the Major, sucking his cigar, and beginning his story with the relish that "unfortunate" men always manifest in relating their misadventures. "I was the second son of a Norfolk baronet. Of course, as the second son, I had not much to look for from the family estate. However, I entered the army, and at once became—I may say, deservedly—the most popular man in the regiment. This was owing partly, perhaps, to my personal good looks, partly to a certain superiority of breeding which my family was ever remarkable for. Then, I was the best actor, the best billiard player, the best cricketer, the smartest officer in the whole garrison. This naturally led to certain successes which it would be sham modesty, at this lapse of time, to ignore. Do not you think so?"

"Humph—gr—umph," was Frank's reply.

He was sound asleep, and the rest of the Major's revelations were consequently not wanted. From

the thrilling interest of the commencement, it may be conjectured that no greater misfortune could happen to the British public than Frank's collapse. But he was a very unlucky man at this juncture of his fortunes.

He slept two or three hours. He was awakened by a pressure at the chest.

He started up, and just had time to grip the wrist of the respectable Mr. Jacob as that worthy was abstracting his watch and chain. Frank was strong as well as young. Jacob was neither young nor strong. Consequently, in less time than it takes to write this line, the watch and chain were back in their owner's pocket, and the luckless Jacob was despatched with many kicks and a little strong language.

The Major was gone.

Frank rubbed his eyes, and sat down again. It was past four, broad daylight, and the sun had risen, as the gilded clock-tower plainly showed.

"Where's the Major?" thought Frank. "Did I dream? Was there a Major, or was it a nightmare? He began to tell me a story about somebody — Kitty something. I wonder if the six shillings are safe. Yes—here they are. What the deuce am I to do now?"

A lovely morning: a sweet, delicious air. London fresh and bright, as if night had cleaned it and swept it.

He got up, refreshed by his light sleep, and strolled down the silent avenue. On his right lay the sleepers upon the benches: poor bundles of rags, mostly; here and there, a woman with a baby; sometimes a girl, pale-faced and emaciated —perhaps a poor shirtmaker, starving in spite of virtue, because virtue, though it brings its own reward, does not always suffer that reward to take the form of a negotiable currency; sometimes a poor creature with cheeks that had once been fair, and had lately been painted—because vice, though it sometimes brings sacks full of money with it, has a trick of running away with all of it in surprising and unexpected ways.

Frank stopped, and looked at one of them. She half opened her eyes. He listened. She murmured, "I sha'n't move on," and then went to sleep again. A few poor remains of finery were on her; a few tags of ribbon; a displaced chignon; a bonnet that had once been flaunting; little brodequins that had once been neat and pretty; a silk dress that had once not been discoloured and bespattered with street mud. Frank was touched with pity.

He stooped over her, and spoke to her. She awoke, started up, and smiled—a horrid, ghastly smile, the memory of which haunted him afterwards.

"Why do you sleep here?" he asked—a foolish question, because there could be only one reason.

"Because I've got no money."

"What do you do in the day?"

"I hide. I come out at night, like the bats." She laughed discordantly. "Give me something, if you have anything."

"I've got six shillings. There are two for you."

"You're a good sort."

She pulled herself together, and got off the seat yawning.

"You had better finish your sleep."

"I have finished. I'm too hungry to sleep any longer. Now I shall go and buy something to eat. I must wake up my sister first, though."

She went and shook a figure in black stuff, without a chignon, who lay on the next bench. A woman about thirty—pale, thin, uncomely, long-suffering.

"Yes," said the first woman, "you see us both. Tilly was the good one. I'm the bad one. Good

or bad, it makes no difference. We've got to starve all the same."

Frank shuddered. Is there nothing, then, in virtue? Can nothing ward off the evils of fate? Is there no power in self-denial, in bitter privation, to change remorseless circumstance, to stave off the miseries allotted by *ἀνάγκη*?

"Good or bad," she repeated, "it's all the same. Just as I told her ten years ago, when I was Kitty Nelaton, and she—"

"Good heavens! Am I dreaming?" said Frank, putting his hand to his head.

"Yes, Kitty Nelaton, of the Adelphi; and she was Tilly Jones, the shirtmaker. And here we are, you see. Come, Tilly, my dear."

"Stop," said Frank. "I've got four shillings more. Take two of them. I've got a watch and chain that I shall pawn by and by. Don't say there's no difference between good and bad. Don't, for God's sake, Kitty!"

The tears stood in his eyes.

"I told you so," said the other woman, in a dull, apathetic way. "I always told you so."

The enthusiasm of virtue had long since been crushed out of her by dire penury; but now that nothing else was possible, the habit of preaching

virtue remained; and, like many preachers, who have small faith or none in their own creeds, she went on in the same old strain, repeating dead words to lifeless ears.

But they took the money, and went away. Frank noticed how they crawled like a pair of old women. But the elder to appearance, the younger in reality by five or six years, was the poor worn-out shirt-maker.

"Let me get out of this place," said Frank. "I should go mad if I came here another night."

It was in the time when the Embankment was building, but not quite finished. Frank went down to the grand old river, which was at high tide, and saw—in the clear, bright air of early dawn, when the black pall of smoke over London lifts and is driven away, only to come back again when men rise from their beds—the towers and spires of the mighty city standing out against the blue sky of the morning.

He communed with himself. In that bright air, it was impossible to feel unhappy. At the age of five-and-twenty, it is impossible not to see hope in everything. Besides, there was literally nothing that he could reproach himself with. His life had been blameless. If we are to go by sins, Frank had

none ;—I speak as a layman. If we are to go by aims and hopes, Frank's were pure and lofty ;—I speak as a layman. If to desire only what is good and right be in itself good and right, then was Frank, at this moment, one of the best of God's creatures. Perhaps I speak as a fool, but indeed I think he was. To few is it given to be so single-hearted and so pure. One sorrow he had, and one hope. That his father's name should be tarnished, was his sorrow. To wipe out the stain, and at the same time to win his love, was his hope.

But how ?

He thought of the man with the big head, who wanted to employ him. This was clearly not the way to get large sums of money, or a great name. But yet—not yet. Two shillings in money—now that Kitty and Tilly were provided with the means of getting through the day—was all that he had in his pocket. Besides this, a silver watch and a chain, which might together fetch five pounds at a pawnbroker's.

It struck six.

"I'm hungry," said Frank, "and I'm dirty. Both are disagreeable things."

He left the Embankment, went up into the Strand, and had a cup of coffee and a piece of

bread—giving twopence to the waiter, like a good Samaritan. The waiter had never had so much money presented to him, in the way of his calling, in all his life before. But instead of showing gratitude, he ran away to an inner apartment, for fear it might be a mistake.

Then he went to the old Roman bath, where he had a plunge in the coldest water in the world, south of the Arctic pole, and came out glowing and strong.

It was only half-past six, so he went back to the Embankment, and smoked a cigar, thinking what he should do next.

"Time goes very slowly for poor people," he reflected. "That, I suppose, is a compensation to them, because it flies so swiftly for the rich."

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

"PAVING-STONES come to feel hard after walking about on them for twenty-four hours or so, no doubt," Frank said to himself as he strolled along the Embankment, looking in vain for a seat. A policeman passed him. "Now, who would be a bobby?" he thought. "An awful time of it they must have. Yet I might put on the blue. I suppose I could procure a nomination. I might come down to that, and yet be—— no; a gentleman drives a Hansom, or he enlists as a soldier,

but nobody ever heard of a gentleman in the police force. Officers, it is true: but even a metropolitan magistrate has never yet complimented them on their gentlemanlike demeanour in the box. Prejudices are queer things. I confess — though I haven't many left—I have an objection to the force. Francis Mellishipp, you must really aim higher than the police force."

He pulled out his watch. It had stopped at half-past six. The key was at Islington. He looked up at the clock tower. It was a quarter to nine.

"A quarter to nine. I am getting hungry again. Remarkable thing. I do not remember being hungry before nine a.m. since I left school. My appetite is becoming serious and embarrassing. 'The wind,' as the old French proverb very prettily says, though King David and Sterne generally get the credit of it, 'is tempered to the shorn lamb.' My experience is, that his appetite does not suit itself to his circumstances. Hang it, I must have some breakfast, and as well now as in an hour's time."

He walked through the Temple into Fleet-street. In the window of a modest-looking coffee-house, an impracticable china tea-pot, surrounded by

freshly cut chops and rashers of ham, gave notice to hungry men that breakfast was to be had within.

Frank took a seat in a box near the door, and ordered his meal; ate it with the greatest relish, and wondered if Dick Mortiboy was up, and whether he would be surprised if his cousin failed to keep his appointment with him.

Then he took up that wonderful chronicle, the advertisement sheet of the *Times*. Order in disorder, if you happen to know where to look for things. Frank did not; so he looked at every page but the right before his eye caught the columns of Wanteds and Want Places. He read the list—the contents of which everybody knows perfectly well, because it never alters—with the curiosity of one interested. He was struck, of course, with that coincidence of people advertising for a place in terms that exactly suit the apparent requirements of people advertising for a person. Everybody has noticed this peculiarity, and novelists have made the most of it.

"Why don't they read this paper, apply for the vacant places, and save their money?" was his reflection.

Any number of cooks and clerks were wanted

by advertisers; any number of "gentlemen," possessed of every possible qualification, advertised for employment for time, capital, or both.

There was not in the list one advertisement which seemed to fit his case. Stay, there was one —a secretary was wanted for an established public company. "A knowledge of the Fine Arts absolutely requisite. Preference will be given to a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge." Frank wrote down the address in his pocket-book. It was an Agency; and Frank Melliship had neither heard, nor read, nor learned from experience, that of all the humbugs in a city full of them, Agencies of all sorts are the greatest humbugs. And the very cream of these swindles are Agencies that rob those poor wretches who, having tried every other method of getting employment, as a last resource enter one of these spiders' dens. I will give an example of their common method of procedure, which is representative. I will take a Servants' Agency to serve my purpose.

Here is a copy of an advertisement from the *Times*. You may see one similarly catching any day and every day :—

GENERAL SERVANT. Is a good PLAIN COOK. Has no objection to undertake washing. Fond of children. Age 24. From the country. Clean, active, willing, and obliging. Waits well at table. 3½ years' excellent character. Wages £9.—"Mary," Mrs. ——, ——Street.

This advertisement appears in the *Times*, the *Telegraph*, and the *Standard* on the same day. The advertisements cost—say fourteen shillings altogether.

Now, how many poor innocent ladies do you think apply to Mrs. —— for that domestic treasure?—poor women who have large families and little means; who can only afford to keep one servant; and perhaps, ever since they were first married, have been wanting that clean, willing country girl who will cook the dinner, and nurse the children, and all well for nine pounds a-year, and have never found her. How many? I should not like to say.

Do you think there ever was such a "Mary?"

Never.

Apply to the advertiser. You may write to her, or go and see her. If the latter, she will smile affably, and tell you—what she will tell you in a letter if you write to her—that it is most unfortunate, because somebody else has just engaged that particular "Mary." On payment, however, of a fee

of half a crown, your name may be placed on the books of the Agency, and you will, doubtless—say in a week or two—be rewarded by having just such another phœnix of domestic servants transferred to your own kitchen.

Transparent traps to catch half-crowns. The sun shines through ruses so clumsy. Very likely. But people won't see it. A proportion of the applicants—large enough to make the game at least remunerative—pay their half-crowns in the certain assurance of getting a Mary exactly like the one who was so unfortunately ravished from their grasp. Of course, they never get her. Then the fool-trap is baited afresh.

Now, multiply Mrs. ——'s humble half-crown by eight. That makes a sovereign. The fee is one sovereign. Divide the number of applicants by any numeral you think will give you the truth as the result of this sum in simple division, and you will know how much Mr. ——, who flies at higher game, gets by his profession of not finding places for secretaries, clerks, ushers, and the rest, who want employment in this great city ;—always remembering that his most frequent quarry is the broken man who knows neither trade nor profession, but must have a gentlemanlike occupation : men who

like young Frank Melliship, are ruined ; but who, unlike him, have no friend. Hundreds of these men have given a sovereign out of their last two or three £ to the Agent, and received in return— 0.

To find these men who want work and can't get it, who deserve well — yet, asking bread, receive stones : here is a field for charity !

Now let us return to Frank Melliship.

I have not called him the hero of my story, because he has done nothing heroic—because he seems to stand in the way of his own success ; and with that noble object he has in view, to be wasting precious time only to earn an indifferent living.

Why does he not apply to John Heathcote ? Why will he not be helped by his superlatively rich cousin, Dick Mortiboy ?

I will tell you why, for I want to paint him as he was. It was a point of pride : determination to show his independence of all those who, as he thought, ought to have saved his father from ruin, madness, and death.

"I will do without them. The world is wide. Energy overcomes all difficulties. Labor omnia vincit."

Boys' copybook rubbish. It does not. RES omnia vincit. It is capital that conquers all things, from a kingdom up to a woman.

"To London and to Art." He had come to town something of an enthusiast. Where Art left him, we have seen. Was this the fault of Art? No.

He wanted long education and years of patient toil to paint even moderately well. This he did not know, and nobody but Kate had ever told him so.

Let us do him justice. He never thought himself a genius; but he believed in his energy, in his determination to succeed, and thought some way would be found by himself. He did not want to be shown the way, or to be helped by any friend of his prosperous days. His desire to be independent, and work his own way, was a sort of vanity; but it is not uncommon. I know a rich man who would rather *earn* a single guinea than that the goddess of Good Luck should shower a hundred into his pocket from the clouds. This was Frank's state of mind too.

He had made an entry of the address of the Agency in his pocket-book, and called the waiter

to him ; when the thought flashed across his mind that he had forgotten, when he ordered his breakfast, the emptiness of his pockets. He explained his predicament to the waiter, and offered to leave his watch with the proprietor. It was, he said, the only thing of value he had about him, except the guard.

The man saw he was a gentleman, and begged him not to trouble about the matter, but pay him any day when he was passing.

"It is the easiest thing in the world," thought Frank, "for a man who always has had money in his pocket, to walk into a shop, and quite forget he has none."

He came to a pawnbroker's, and he thought he had better pawn his watch and chain at once. He must have some money.

There was a shop window full of plate and jewellery : in a side street was an open door-way, revealing a row of little doors. Frank guessed what these cabinets were, but he was some few minutes before he could make up his mind to go in. He looked at the costly things in the window—he walked past the doorway ; at last, looking cautiously up the street and down the street, as if he were about to commit a burglary, and was afraid

of the policeman who might be round the corner, he plunged into one of the little boxes, falling over an old woman who was haggling with the shopman for sixpence more than she had got last time on a pair of sheets.

Frank flushed in his confusion, apologized, and tried the next cabinet. This was empty; and here, trying to look as if he had often done it before, he put down his watch and chain on the counter with the grace of a roué, and waited his turn.

The man examined his watch, asked if it was in going order, weighed his chain, and smiled as he leered at him through his spectacles.

Frank, despite his efforts, looked so completely innocent.

"How much?"

Frank hesitated before he answered.

"How much will you lend me?"

"Tell me how much you want?"

"Well, a fiver."

"All right. These aint been in before, young gentleman."

"How do you know?" asked Frank, blushing, and very much ashamed of the transaction he was engaged in.

"We've got a private mark in the trade we put on everything that comes in," said the man; and Frank believed him.

He began to write out the ticket.

"What name?"

"Must I give it?"

"Not unless you like. Any name 'll do. Mr. Smith, of Piccadilly, it generally is. Will that do?"

Frank nodded.

"Got fourpence? For the ticket, you know."

The poor boy blushed scarlet.

"All right, my lad: there you are. Four"—he dashed down the sovereigns—"nineteen, eight."

Frank put the money and the ticket in his pocket, and went back to pay for his breakfast.

Then he made his way to the Agency.

The proprietor had not come, but his clerk told Frank he had a very good list of appointments "suitable for any gentleman to take."

Frank was very glad to hear this, and asked for some particulars about the secretaryship advertised.

"Our fee for entering a name is a sovereign—over a hundred and fifty a-year—half a sovereign under it. This secretaryship is three hundred.

Fine Arts Company (Limited). The governor's in it, and it'll soon be got up."

To the credit of Frank Mellishipp's common sense, I record the fact that he did not pay the sovereign, but asked the fellow what they meant by their advertisement. He had a copy of it in his book, and he read it out.

The clerk was evidently of an irritable temperament. Perhaps they often had a row in the office. He was rude to Frank. He turned on his heel, and left the counter, with the words—

"P'raps you know gentlemen as hasn't got a sovereign. Coming here, wasting our time and kicking up a row!"

The being was too contemptible to thrash, but his remark opened Frank's eyes to the position of things. That such a little cad dared insult him!

He turned into a bye-street, and looked for a quiet corner where he could sit down and curse fate. There was none. So he cursed fate as he walked along.

After walking for half an hour or so, he began to pull himself together.

"Swearing will not help, at any rate. Something must be done, and that soon. I believe I am getting hungry again. What a misfortune to have

such a twist. Poverty may be invigorating, but it's unpleasant. I don't think I'm strong enough to take the medicine. As for taking money from Dick, that, of course, is out of the question."

He was walking along a West-end street, and saw at a door a brass plate, with "University and Scholastic Agency" upon it.

"Let us try the schools. Perhaps they won't ask for a sovereign," he said, and went in.

They did not. The agent, a man of extremely affable and polished manners, invited Frank to sit down, and asked him what he could do.

"Tell me candidly. I've got plenty of places."

"I've taken a Poll degree at Cambridge. I know very little Latin or Greek, and no mathematics."

"Bad," said the agent. "Any French?"

"Oh, French—of course. And—and I can paint and draw."

"A good cricketer? Anything of an oar?"

"Yes—rowed five in the first college boat. Played in the college eleven."

"My dear sir, a public school will be delighted to have you. They don't care, you see, about their junior masters being great scholars, because they have found out that any one can teach the boys their Delectus. But they do want athletics.

You'd be worth your weight in gold to a head master. Sit down at that table, and put down all you can do. First-class Poll, I think you said."

"No—last. I just scraped through."

"Well, never mind. Sit down and write."

"So"—he read over Frank's modest list of accomplishments—"I will find—it is now July the 10th—before the vacations are over, a really good opening for you."

"But I've had no experience in teaching."

"What does that matter? Look at your experience in the field and on the river. Give me your address."

"I must find one first. I am—I am looking for lodgings; but I will send it you as soon as possible."

He came out of the office with a lightened heart. Something would be got: something unpleasant, naturally—because the order of things allots all unpleasant things to poor men—but still, the means of life. In a few minutes he was perfectly happy in his new prospects—just as a drowning man is happy to find a plank even if he is in mid-ocean, with no ship in sight.

Then, a sudden reflection dashed his pleasure. He was to have his new post when the summer

vacation was over. How was he to live till then? If on his wardrobe, there would be no possibility of presenting a respectable exterior; and his watch and chain would not go very far.

He put his hand into his empty pocket, and pulled out the card which he had taken from the Jewish gentleman the night before.

"By Jove! it's Bighead's card. I'll go and see him."

It bore the name of Mr. Emmanuel Leweson, and an address in Brunswick-square.

Thither Frank bent his steps, tired and fagged with the long walking about he had had. A cab, of course, was not to be thought of.

He sent in his card—Mr. Leweson was at home—and in a few minutes he found himself again in the presence of his acquaintance of the evening before.

Mr. Leweson looked more big-headed than ever, sitting over a late breakfast—it was half-past twelve—in a light dressing-gown. He had been breakfasting luxuriously. The table was covered with fruit and flowers. He was drinking Rhine wine from a long flask.

"Come in, Mr. Melliship—since that is your name. I am glad to see you—very glad. Take a glass of wine, and sit down. And now," he said,

finishing his breakfast, and lighting a cigar, "let us talk business. Tell me as much as you like about yourself, Mr. Melliship. The more the better."

Frank told him as much as he thought advisable.

"So—no money; expensive tastes; habits of a gentleman; no special knowledge; art and music. Now, Mr. Melliship, do you know what I am?"

"No; something theatrical, I should say."

"That is because I wear a velvet coat, and breakfast off fruit and Rhine wine, I suppose? No. You are not far wrong, however. I am a musical composer by nature; the owner and manager of a London music hall by will of a malignant fate. Yes, young man—in me you see the manager of the North London Palace of Amusements."

He waved his hand as he spoke, as if deprecating the other's contempt.

"I know, I know. They sing, 'Rollicking Rams' and 'Champagne Charlie'—not a bad air, that last—and we are altogether a degraded and degrading place. But we must pay, dear sir, we must pay. I do more than the rest of them, because I always try to get something good. For instance, I've got you."

"I don't know that you have," said Frank,

laughing. The big-headed man amused him tremendously.

"You will come and sing three songs every evening—allowing yourself to be encored for one only, because time is precious. You will thus gain confidence, as well as three guineas a-week. I intend to push you, and we shall have you on the boards of the Royal Italian before many years. Then you will remember with gratitude that I brought you out."

"Do I understand you to offer me—"

"Do you want pen, ink and paper? Have I not said it? Ask the people at the music hall if Leweson's word is not as good as any other man's bond. Will you accept?'

"Don't ask me to sing under my own name."

"Sing in any name you like—only sing for me."

"Very well, then."

Mr. Leweson held out his hand, and shook Frank's by way of ratifying the bargain.

"And now come with me," he said, "and we will pay a visit to the Palace. A poor place, after all; but the people go there—the idiotic, stupid people. Would you believe that I brought out the music of my opera there, and they hissed it? Then I engaged the Inexpressible Jones, placarded all

London, gave them 'Rollicking Rams' and the rest of it, and the people all came back again. Dolts, asses, idiots, loonatics!"

He banged his head with his fist at every epithet, and then put on his hat—an enormous brigand's hat—with a scowl of revenge and hatred. Then he burst out laughing, and led the way out.

They took a Hansom from the stand.

"How I wish you could do trapeze business," said Mr. Leweson. "I suppose you can't, by any chance?"

"No—I'm afraid not."

"You could act so well with Giulia. The poor girl has only got her father and little Joe to fall back on. It would tell immensely if we could put you in. The talented Silvani family. Signor Pietro Silvani, Signor Francesco, and the Divine Giulia. A brilliant idea just occurred to me—a combination of three. The Signor at the bottom, with rings instead of a bar; you on his shoulders; Giulia on yours. Giulia is left at the first trapeze; you at the second; the undaunted head of the family goes on to the last. Bless you, Giulia wouldn't be afraid! She's afraid of nothing, that girl. But there, if you can't do it, you can't, of course. After all, it might spoil your career as a tenor. Don't let us think of it. Where do you live?"

Frank turned red.

"I'm looking for lodgings now."

"Oh! Well, then, the best thing I can do is to send you to Mrs. Skimp's. She's cheap, and tolerably good. Here we are, sir, at the Palace, where every evening the British public may receive, at the ridiculous price of one shilling, the highest form of amusement compatible with their state of civilization. Here's the stage door. That is your door. I am busy to-day, and cannot give you any more time. Take my card, and show it to Mrs. Skimp. That will do for an introduction; and for the present, at least, you can stay there. And come round here to-morrow at one. Good-bye. Take care of your throat."

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH.

AFTER their dinner together at Dick Mortiboy's hotel, before he bade his cousin good-night, Frank promised to breakfast with him the next day.

The morning came. Breakfast was on the table, Dick was waiting.; but no Frank arrived. So as young Ready-money—as the Market Basing people began to call him—never in his life had stood on much ceremony of any kind, he ate a very substantial breakfast without his guest; felt a little vexed that the cutlets were cold: wondered where Frank was, and why he did not come; and, finally, strolled into the smoking-room, and lighted his cigar.

He had scarcely drawn a dozen whiffs of smoke, when the waiter brought up a card on a silver tray.

"By Jove! here he is; but breakfast's done with." And without looking at the card, he said, "Show the gentleman up, and order some more breakfast."

But the card was not Frank's. It bore the name of Alcide Lafleur.

Let me say a word about Dick Mortiboy's partner.

All this time, what has Alcide Lafleur been doing? What of the System, the infallible method of breaking banks, to follow up which was the primary object of the partners' return to the old country? Dick, not unmindful of his pledge, very shortly after his accession to fortune, made over to Lafleur the five thousand he had promised him. He did not consider himself so bound by the terms of that old oath of his, which we have recorded, as to make an immediate division of his property into two halves, and to give Lafleur one; but he did consider himself bound, in a general way, to abide by him till their partnership was dissolved by

mutual consent. Meantime, Lafleur seemed in no hurry to test his System: he stayed in London, drawing on Dick occasionally for small sums, and keeping the five thousand intact for the Hombourg expedition. Certain small dabblings he made at écarté, hazard, loo, and such games of chance as were to be found in London circles, just to keep his hand in; but his main business was to pore over his calculations, day after day, in order to reduce his method to a mathematical certainty. Lafleur, a cool, clear-headed man, studied, as soon as he found it likely to help him, the Science of Probabilities. It helped him to the extent of furnishing him with an inexhaustible supply of figures and calculations; and it strengthened, so far as he could see, the chances of the System he had perfected.

His System was to him what his model is to an inventor. It had grown up with years of steady play and unsteady fortunes. The idea of it came into his head when Dick and he were engaged in blockade running, and used to while away their leisure hours in a little game on the after-deck, while the crew were having their little games in the forecastle. It took root and grew slowly, taking form as it grew, till, to the inventor's eyes, it seemed

absolutely perfect and consistent. No run of luck, he thought, would stand against it. With a capital of £5,000, so as to meet the very worst contingencies, it was so certain to win, that he could defy fortune. He had made one or two little ventures with it in America, before they came over, with perfect success; and then, having that kind of love for it which makes a man shrink from using his invention till the day of experiment comes, he postponed considerable operations till he could use it at the Hombourg tables. He was like an aëronaut with a new machine. He looked at it, examined it, admired it, ornamented it, boasted of it; but put off the day of its trial, which would be either his death or his glory. Dick provided him with money for his personal expenditure, so that the five thousand remained intact. For himself, Lafleur wanted comparatively little. He was not a man of expensive tastes. He drank, but apparently without great enjoyment, and never so as to produce any effect on his head. He smoked, but in great moderation, and only light cigarettes. He loved to dress well—but this was necessary for a gentleman in his line of life. And he liked to have the reputation of doing certain things well—with which object, he might have been seen practising with a

pistol in a gallery, or fencing with a professional: this also with a view to certain contingencies.

He was so perfectly confident of his System—so thoroughly reliant on its power of breaking any bank ever started, however rich—that he did not, at this time, regard his old partner's altered position with either envy or distrust. Dick had kept his word by him honestly, as he always did—Dick's word being quite as good as any other man's oath. The money which he wanted for the System, on the possession of which he based all his calculations, was in his hands. So far, all was well. With this capital, he asked no more. Lafleur, at this time, was no vulgar and greedy adventurer, eager to get money anyhow. From this he was saved by belief in his System. All he wanted was the means of applying it. To get the means he was, of course, prepared—as we have already seen—to do anything, everything. Having the means, he desired only to bring his calculations to practical uses, and, after fleecing the bankers in a perfectly legitimate way, to settle down somewhere or other—say in Paris. He had not the delight in roving and wild scenes that his partner had. No coward, he shrank from that kind of life where personal conflicts are common. This dislike to rough-and-tumble fights—common

enough among Frenchmen, was atoned for by his perfect readiness to fight with pistols or sword. Dick was ready, on the other hand, with either fist or weapon. The partnership between them had been at all times true, but at no time cordial—at least, on Lafleur's part. He admired the man who feared nothing and braved everything. He respected his pluck, his determination, his wilfulness, the way in which he forced his own way on people. What he disliked was a certain brutalité in his partner—a coarseness, he thought, of fibre—a want of delicacy in taste. He liked to dress carefully. Dick dressed anyhow—with a certain splendour when in funds. Lafleur liked to live fastidiously. Dick cared little what he ate and drank, provided the meat was in plenty, and the liquor strong, and in plenty too. A great beefsteak, and a pot of foaming stout—these represented to Lafleur his partner's tastes, to which he was himself so immensely superior. Dick, on the other hand, could not but feel some pity—a little mingled with contempt—for a man so slightly built, so singularly useless in a row. At the same time, he admired his dexterity at all games of chance, and the calm way in which he met the strokes of fortune.

A well-matched pair, so far as each supple-

mented certain deficiencies in the other: an ill-matched pair, because they had no kind of sympathy with each other: a partnership of a brace of penniless adventurers, determined to live on the world as best they might: a society which held together by the bonds of habit, of long use, and the fact that each entirely trusted in the honesty of his companion—Dick because he was loyal, Lafleur because he was sagacious.

But now there was a feeling growing up in both men's minds that the partnership was to come to an end, and each be free to go his own way. How the separation was to take place, which of the two was to introduce the subject, neither knew. Dick, for his part—resolved Lafleur should no longer be associated with him in the new life he was to lead—was prepared to make almost any sacrifice to break off the connection. Lafleur, on the other hand, was equally ready to go, on no conditions whatever. He had the System, and the capital to start with.

They met, therefore, when Dick went up to town, on a new footing. Men have been divided into rooks and pigeons—borrowers and lenders—sharks, and prey for sharks. But there is a third and a very important class: the class of those who

defend their own. As strong as the beasts and birds of prey, they are braver, because they are backed up by law and public opinion. It was to this class that Dick Mortiboy belonged now: Lafleur still to the camp which he had deserted. It is true that Dick half regretted the old days of excitement and peril, when they talked only to contrive new dodges, and went about to execute them. What he really missed, and would have recalled, was the wild freedom of the old life, not its antagonism to society. Conventionality, not mankind, was his enemy. This he hated, and it weighed upon him like a thick blanket on a summer's night.

Lafleur came into the room. Dick held out his hand.

His partner sat down. With the cold smile that always played about his pale face, he asked—

"When are we going to Hombourg?"

"I don't know. I don't think I shall go at all."

"You were half engaged to go with me," said Lafleur, reproachfully. "But, of course, if you cannot come— Is your cousin with you still?"

"No. I am waiting for him. You have been trying the System again?"

"Dick, it is perfect." His face had a pallid enthusiasm when he spoke of his invention. "I have studied it so long that I know every combination the chances can take. I must win. I cannot help it. I am almost sorry I had so much money from you, because I really shall not want it all. My capital is too big."

"Still—still— You know, luck may go so as no mortal capital ever held can stand against it. Remember that night when we were cleaned out at St. Louis."

"It may—of course it may. But it never does. At whist, you *may* hold thirteen trumps, if you are dealing. But who ever does? No man in his senses ever contemplates a hand like that. The night at St. Louis was a bad one, I admit. It was before my System was completed, though, or else we should— No—no, we had no capital then. But I've counted every reasonable combination, Dick, everything I ever *saw* happen—and you'll admit that I've seen a good deal—I've played countless games on paper, and I've always won. Come over with me, and see me break the banks, one after the other. By heaven, Dick, I shall be far richer than you!"

"I should like to go. But, no—I think I had

better not leave my own place just now. But there, you don't understand the position of things."

"I understand," said Lafleur, "that the position of Mr. Dick Mortiboy is considerably altered for the better. I suppose—But, Dick, really I did not think you would have been so quick in throwing over old friends."

"I have thrown over no old friends. Did I not honestly redeem my word, and hand you the capital you asked for?"

"You did. That is not quite all, though. Did we not discuss the System all the way across the Atlantic? Were you not as keen as I about it? Who but you thought of coming over to England? Why did we come? To get out of your father this very sum—not to hand over to me, Dick, but to enable us to go away together, and break the banks in our old partnership. And now, when all is gained, you care nothing about it. Is it what I expected from you, Dick? I counted on your seeing my victories as much as on making them."

This was true. He wanted Dick's admiration and praise. He wanted to feel a man's envy.

"Because, you see," answered his partner, "a good deal more is gained than we bargained for. I no longer care to gamble. What does it mean if

you care nothing about winning or losing? Upon my word, Lafleur, I would almost as soon, if it were not for the habit of the thing, dance a waltz without any music as play at cards without caring to win. Life when you're rich is quite a different sort of thing to what we experienced in the old days. It's slower, to begin with. You find that everybody is your friend, in the second place. Then you discover that, instead of looking about to do good to yourself, you've got to fuss and worry about doing good to other people."

"Fancy Dick Mortiboy doing good to anybody!"

"Queer, isn't it? But true. They tell me I'm doing good, so I suppose I am. Then, after all, you can't eat and drink more than a certain amount. You don't want to have more than a dogcart and a riding-horse. You can't be always giving dinners and things. What are you to do with your money? You've always got the missionaries left, to be sure; but you're an ass if you give them anything."

"By Jove—I should think so, indeed!" said Lafleur.

"Then what are you to do with yourself and your money? I make a few bets, but I don't care

much about it. I play a game of billiards, but it doesn't matter whether I win or lose. Life's lost its excitements, Lafleur. The old days are gone."

"In England, you can always go on the turf. There is plenty of money to be lost there."

"I never cared much about horse-races, unless I was riding in them myself. I daresay I shall go on the turf, though, for a little excitement. I don't know what I shall do, Lafleur. When life becomes insupportable, I shall go across the water again, I think, and stay till I am tired of that, and want a change. But as for cards—why, what excitement is equal to that of playing for your very dinner, as we have done before now? How can one get up any pleasure in a game when it does not really signify how it ends?"

"You always think of the end. But think of the play, Dick. Think of working out your own plan, and going down with it, and fleecing everybody—eh? Is there no excitement there?"

"There would be if I wanted the money. Not now. I never cared to win from those who couldn't afford to lose, Lafleur."

"I know. You were always soft-hearted, Dick. Now, if a man plays with me, I play to win. It is his look-out whether he can afford to pay or not. I

play to win. I've got no more feeling, Dick, over cards than the green table itself."

The candour of this admission of Lafleur's was equalled by its truth.

Dick sighed, and leaned his head upon his hand.

"By Jove, they were good times, some of them. Do you remember that very day, after the St. Louis cleaning out, how we woke up in the morning without a cent between us?"

Lafleur nodded. Some reminiscences of Dick's were unpleasant. But he seemed warming back to his old tone, and Lafleur wanted to take him over to Hombourg with him.

"You went to the billiard-rooms. I went to the Monty Saloon. And when we met again in the evening we had got six hundred dollars. That was the day when I fought the Peruvian. It was a near thing. I'll never fight a duel blindfolded again. I thought I heard his steps, and I let fly. He had it in the right arm—broke the bone. Then he fired with the left hand—being a blood-thirsty rascal—and hit Cæsar, the black waiter, in the calf. I remember how we laughed. Then we went on to Cairo. Upon my word, Lafleur, when I think of those days, my blood boils. All fair play, too.

Every man trying to cheat his neighbour. Good, honest gambling, with a bowie knife ready at your neck."

"All fair play," echoed Lafleur, with the faintest smile on his lips.

"It was better than the blockade running, after all; though there were some very pretty days in that. It was better than—I say, after all, don't you think the best moment of our lives was when we stood on board the little schooner, dripping wet, after our swim from the reef of Palmiste?"

At another time, Lafleur would have resented this recollection of an extremely disagreeable episode in his life. Now he laughed.

"Yes," he said, "perhaps it was a moment of relief, after a mauvais quart d'heure. It was then that we swore our partnership."

"It was," said Dick. We've kept to our terms ever since. Lafleur, the time has come for our separation. I can no longer lead the old life. All that is done with. We are adventurers no more. I have my fortune; you possess your capital and—your System."

"I shall soon be as rich as you with it," said Lafleur, confidently.

"We are partners no longer, then? It is dis-

solved, Lafleur. I've got the best of it; but don't say Dick Mortiboy ever turned his back upon a friend. If you have not money enough, let me know. Take more."

"I have plenty. I cannot fail. It is impossible. But I want you to come to Hombourg with me. See me succeed, Dick—see me triumph with my System. That is all I ask."

"I will see," said Dick. "I will not promise to go with you. Twelve years, Lafleur, we have fought our battles side by side. I remember the words of my oath to you as well as if I spoke them yesterday:—'If I can help you, I will help you. If I have any luck, you shall have half. If I ever have any money, you shall have half.' Was it not so? Yet you have only had five thousand pounds of all my money. It is because my father's money is not mine, really, I only hold it. I have it for certain purposes—I hardly know what yet. I could not keep my word in its literal sense."

"Dick, I don't ask you," said Lafleur. "I have told you I am satisfied."

"Then you give me back my word?" said Dick.

"I solemnly give it back, Dick," was the reply.

He held out his hand, which Dick grasped. He heaved a great sigh. Their partnership was dis-

solved. His oath had been heavy upon him, for Dick's word was sacred—the only sacred thing he knew. The vast fortune into which he had so unexpectedly fallen, with all its duties and responsibilities, which Dick was already beginning to realize, was so complicated an affair, that, in the most perfect honesty, he could not literally fulfil his promise. He did the next best thing. He gave Lafleur all he asked for. He was prepared to give him as much again—three times as much, if necessary. But he was glad to get back his word—returned to him like a paid cheque, or a duly honoured bill.

It is not clear that Dick is progressing in civilization? He has recognized the voice of public opinion. He has remarked that the force of circumstances compels him, whether he will or no, to lead an outwardly decorous life. He has recognized, dimly as yet, that this vast property cannot be made ducks and drakes of, flung away, spent recklessly, as he fondly promised himself when he undeceived his father. He sees that it is like the root-work of some great trees, spreading out branches in all directions, small and great branches: to tear up and destroy them would be to change the

fortunes of thousands, to ruin, to revolutionize, to devastate.

Things must be as they are. He is now free: he has got back his word, and is clear of Lafleur.

This is a great gain.

There is still, however, one link which holds him with the past.

It is————POLLY!

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

MRS. SKIMP'S. Her establishment is in Granville-square, Islington—one of those pleasant places where fashion and aristocracy have never penetrated to corrupt the simplicity of the natives. Mrs. Skimp's is two houses converted into one by knocking a door through the partition wall on each floor. Everybody in the neighbourhood knows it, for Mrs. Skimp has been there a good many years. Frank asked the way to Granville-square at a baker's shop: it happened to be Mrs. Skimp's baker.

"This little b'y's just going there, sir," the woman behind the counter said, very civilly. "He will show you the way. What number might you want, sir?"

"Thirty-three."

"Thirty-three and thirty-four. Mrs. Skimp's, sir," said the woman, her face brightening up at the prospect of three extra loaves a-week being wanted. "That's the house the little b'y's going to."

Frank followed the boy with his load of bread.

In three minutes they were in the square. It was an oblong really, and not so wide as Regent's Quadrant; and it had a badly kept strip of garden in the middle. The houses were plastered over; and, with two or three exceptions, wanted a coat of paint as badly as houses could. Mrs. Skimp's was an exception. It was a house of three storeys, and attics in the roof. Over the doors were lamps slightly projecting from the pane of glass that lets light into the hall; and on these, in huge gilt figures, 33 and 34 blazed in the sun. They were repeated again on the door.

The boy pulled the area bell, and pointed to the knocker and then to Frank, when a dirty servant came out at the basement door to take in the bread.

Frank's knock remained a minute unanswered; but he saw the lace curtains of the window move, and caught sight of a face—apparently a young lady's—peeping at him over the blind.

Then the servant came and showed him into a room, evidently the dining-room.

Here he had to wait while Mrs. Skimp and her daughter "put themselves to rights."

Presently they came in together. Mrs. Skimp was tall, and of rather pleasing appearance. Her daughter was short and stout, and decidedly uninteresting.

"She takes after my lamented husband, the late Mr. Skimp," her mother often said. "She is quite unlike my family."

They both bowed very cordially to Frank. He bowed in return.

"I desire to—to—"

"Board and reside with a private family of good position. I quite understand, sir. Our circle is small and select. Terms from twenty-two and six, according to the room. Was it the *Telegraph* or the *Times*, sir?" asked this voluble personage.

"Neither, madam," said Frank. "Mr. Leweson recommended me to see you on the subject."

"Very kind, indeed, of Mr. Leweson. We know him quite well, my dear—do we not? A very agreeable gentleman, and quite the *artiste*. Such ears!"

Frank looked at her in surprise. He thought, at

first, she alluded to the size of them, which was quite a natural, if not a polite thing, to say; but no, it was a tribute to his musical genius.

Mrs. Skimp, as the reader has already discovered, kept a cheap boarding-house. Like all of her profession, she persisted in calling it "a private family and a select circle."

She read Frank's name on Mr. Leweson's card, and showed him the bed-rooms then at her disposal, expatiating in glowing terms on the advantages of living in such a neighbourhood as Granville-square —and particularly with such a family as Mrs. Skimp's.

"We have the key of the square, for the use of the boarders, sir," she said.

Frank could not help contrasting, in his own mind, the key of the square offered by Mrs. Skimp, with the key of the street so lately in his possession.

There certainly is some difference between the two.

His interview with Mrs. Skimp was short and satisfactory. Anybody who came with Mr. Leweson's recommendation was received by her with great pleasure. She was about forty-five years of age, a widow with one daughter, Clara. She was

born to become fat and comfortable; but nature's intentions were so far frustrated by the hard conditions of life that, while becoming fat, she by no means looked comfortable, having an air of anxiety which came from an external effort to bring her bills within the compass of her income. She was short-winded, because the stairs, up and down which she ran all day long, had made her so. She held her hand upon her heart, not because she suffered from any palpitation, but from a habit she had contracted after her husband's death. It indicated resignation and sorrow. Her hair was already streaked with grey. Her eyes were sharp; but her mouth was soft. That meant that she would have been kind-hearted, had it not been her lot to contend with people who seemed all bent upon cheating her.

She kept a cheap boarding-house. It was a place where you received your dinner, breakfast, and bed-room for the modest sum of twenty-five shillings a-week—with the usual extras, Mrs. Skimp would say, explaining that the gentlemen paid for their own liquor, of which she always kept the very best that could be got for money. They also paid extra for washing. She took Frank over the house.

"This," she said, "is the dining-room."

It was a room with two pieces of furniture in it, a table and a sideboard. The latter, a veneered piece of workmanship, in an advanced state of decay, was covered with tumblers, glasses, and bottles. Each bottle had a card tied round it, with somebody's name on it. Round the red earthenware water-bottle was tied a huge placard, on which was written, in characters an inch long, "Mr. Eddrup." Mrs. Skimp took it off with an air of annoyance, and tore it up. A dozen chairs were ranged round the walls of the apartment. There was very little besides: no pictures; dirty muslin curtains; no carpet. It was the front room, and looked out into the square, where half a dozen brown trees were making a miserable pretence of summer, and the children were tumbling over each other on the pavement outside the rails.

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Skimp, "it is a privilege of my boarders to go into the garden, if they like, and smoke their pipes there. And very beautiful it is, on a fine evening, when the flowers are out, I do assure you. Now, let me show you the billiard-room, sir."

At the back of the dining-room was a billiard table. Old it was, certainly; the baize torn and

patched, and torn again; the cushions dull and lumpy; the balls untrue from their long battering; the cues mostly without their tops;—but still a billiard table: undeniably, a billiard table.

"It is an extra, of course," said Mrs. Skimp, with pride. "We charge a shilling a-week for the privilege of coming into this room. Some of the gentlemen"—this with a deprecatory simper—"spend their Sunday mornings here instead of at church. But perhaps, sir, you've been better brought up."

She led the way to the drawing-room, ornamented with a round table in the middle, curtains, and two or three battered easy-chairs. In them were seated two men, smoking pipes. They looked up as Frank came in, but did not offer to remove their pipes from their mouths.

"This is the drawing-room, where the boarders sit after dinner, and play cards if they like, or amuse themselves," she whispered. "That is Cap'en Bowker, him with the red beard; and the other is Cap'en Hamilton, him with the moustache —both boarders, sir."

Frank gave half a look at them, and followed his guide to the bed-room. He got a small room —two of them had been made out of a big room

by putting up a partition, and taking half the window—arranged to bring his portmanteau round at once, and went away.

"We dine at half-past five, Mr. Mellishipp—punctual. I do hope you won't keep us waiting, because the gentlemen use such dreadful language if the meat is overdone."

"I'll be punctual, Mrs. Skimp," said Frank, as he trudged off to his old lodgings, and brought away his luggage.

Then he strolled about the delightful neighbourhood of Islington—new to him—making acquaintance with the most remarkable monuments of the place; and then he found it was five o'clock, and he turned homewards to be in time for dinner.

"Not expected to dress at Skimp's, I suppose," he said.

The bell rang as he opened the dining-room door. The room was filled by about a dozen men of all ages. They greeted Frank with the stare of rude inquiry by which men of a certain class welcome a new comer.

"Swell down on his luck," murmured Captain Hamilton to the lad—a King's College medical student—who stood by him, leaning half out of window.

At the moment, a red-cheeked and bare-armed servant-maid brought in the dinner. She was followed by Mrs. Skimp, who had brushed her hair, and put on a clean cap for dinner, and now assumed the head of the table, rapping with the handle of her carving knife to summon her boarders.

They took their seats.

"You must take the bottom seat, Mr. Melliship," said the hostess, gracefully pointing with a fork. "No, not the end—that's Mr. Eddrup's. That's right: next to Cap'en Bowker. Jane, take the cover off."

Just then there glided into the room an old gentleman, dressed in black coat and gray trousers. He took his place at the end of the table. Nobody took the least notice of him—except Captain Bowker, who asked him, in a whisper, if he was better. Mr. Eddrup shook his head, and poured out a glass of water. This was a sort of signal; for there is no better opportunity of displaying wit than when you are waiting to be served, and no safer a method than that of chaffing an old man.

The medical student began. How delightful is the flow of spirits, unchecked by the ordinary restrictions of politeness, which distinguishes a certain class of medical students!

He burst into a horse laugh, and pointed at Mr. Eddrup.

"Ha, ha!—Ho, ho! There he goes again. Must cool his coppers."

"Where did you get tight last night, Mr. Eddrup?" cried Captain Hamilton, whom Frank set down at once as a leg of the most unmitigated description. He was one of those shady, suburban-race men who hang about at small meetings, living heaven knows how. At present, he was three or four weeks in debt at Skimp's, and was meditating flight, with the partial sacrifice of his wardrobe.

"I think I saw him at the Alhambra about eleven," said another, a City clerk. "He was winking at the ballet girls."

"Oh, Mr. Eddrup!—Oh, bad man!" was groaned all round the table; and then everybody laughed.

Mr. Eddrup took not the smallest notice of anybody, calmly sitting with his eyes fixed before him. The immobility of his features was very remarkable. He took no notice at all, either by look or gesture. He was a small, thin man, with a broad, high brow. His hair, which had not fallen off, and was still thick, lay in long, white masses—much longer than young men wear it—and gave him a singular, out-of-the-way appearance, not easily for-

gotten. But his face attracted Frank at once. It had a quite inexpressible charm of sweetness. The cheeks were pinched in; round the eyes were crows'-feet; the lips were thin; but in the sad smile that lived upon his mouth you could read the presence of some spirit of content which made the foolish gibes of the rest fall upon him unregarded. Who was he? Why did he live at Skimp's? Frank caught himself looking at him during the dinner with ever-increasing wonder. It must be poverty;—perhaps it was avarice. His clothes were worn and threadbare. He drank nothing but water with his dinner.

The dinner consisted of an enormous leg of mutton — the biggest ever seen, probably, and, Frank thought, perhaps the stringiest. He found that you could have beer, or even wine—only that luxury was hardly known at Mrs. Skimp's dinner table—by ordering it of the red-armed attendant. During the intervals of feeding, a running horse-play of wit went on at Mr. Eddrup's expense. His appetite was commented on—his personal appearance and habits. Stories, not the most delicately chosen, were told about his antecedents. To all this Mr. Eddrup was entirely callous. Captain Hamilton greatly distinguished himself in this

feast of reason by a persistent disregard of a woman's presence, and a steady accumulation of insinuations against the morals of the old gentleman, which did him infinite credit.

"Does this sort of thing go on every evening?" asked Frank of his neighbour, Captain Bowker, the only one who took no part in the conversation.

"Every morning and every evening. Breakfast and dinner. At two bells and the dog watch," replied Captain Bowker.

Frank hardly understood the last allusion, but let it pass.

Dinner concluded as it had begun, without the ceremony of grace, and the guests rose one by one, and strolled into the billiard-room.

Captain Hamilton and the three at the end of the table alone remained. He advanced to Frank with an easy grace, and tendered him his card.

"Let us know each other," he said, "as we are for the moment in the same hole."

Frank took the card: "Captain Hamilton." No regiment upon it.

"Ceylon Rifles," said the Captain.

"My name is Melliship," said Frank. He would not have another alias.

"Come and join our pool, Mr. Mellishp."

"No, thank you. I never play at billiards, except—that is, I never do play."

"Come and look on. You can bet on the game, and smoke."

"I never bet, thank you," said Frank, coldly.

"Well, what do you do, then?" asked the Captain, rudely.

"What the devil, sir, is that to you?"

The blood rushed through Frank's veins again. He was getting combative against this thinly-disguised rook.

Captain Hamilton turned on his heel, and went away. A minute or two afterwards the click of the balls was heard, and an approving laugh at some anecdote of the gallant officer's—probably an account, from his own point of view, of his late interview with Frank.

Mr. Eddrup still sat at the end of the table—Captain Bowker beside him. They rose together as soon as the room was cleared.

"Young man," said Captain Bowker, "I am glad to hear that you don't bet—likewise that you don't play billiards. Come upstairs, and have a pipe in the drawing-room with me and Mr. Eddrup. We use this room pretty much to ourselves," said Cap-

tain Bowker, taking an easy-chair. "The others prefer the billiard-room. They go out, too, a good deal in the evenings. That's a great thing at Skimp's. A man *is* left alone if he likes."

The speaker was a man of about fifty-five or so —weather-beaten, rugged. He had fair hair and blue eyes, and had a habit of looking straight ahead at nothing, which comes of a dreamy nature. He was an old "ship captain"—*i.e.*, a merchant service skipper.

It is a singular thing about skippers, that ashore they are all uniformly the most gentle, tractable creatures that walk about. They drink sometimes, which is their only vice. You may do what you like with them. A child can lead them with a thread. Afloat! Phew! Defend us from serving under the flag of a merchantman—British or Yankee. Language which belongs to the merchant service alone; hard blows which belong peculiarly to the galleys; rough treatment, such as a Moorish prisoner used to look for—all these you may expect from the merchant captain.

But Captain Bowker was ashore now, and it was only from occasional hints in conversation that you got any gleams of light as to the other side of him.

Mr. Eddrup did not smoke. He sat at the window, and leaned his head on his hand.

"They're a wild set downstairs," said Captain Bowker. "They want a little discipline."

"They are all young," said Mr. Eddrup—"all young. We pardon everything to the young." He turned to Frank, smiling.

"I don't know," said Frank. "I should not be inclined to pardon everything to the young. I like men of my own age—I suppose I am young—to behave with some approach to good manners, as well as to be men of honour."

"Honourable. Yes—yes. The young must be always honourable. We can pardon anything but dishonesty. But good manners. Surely, sir, it is a very small matter."

"Well, yes—but a sufficiently important small matter, Mr. Eddrup. May I light a cigar?"

He lit and smoked one of Dick's Havanas—Captain Bowker all the while puffing vigorously at a pipe with a long cherry stick, which held about an ounce or so of cut-up ship tobacco. No one came near them except Mrs. Skimp, who brought up tea. She gave Frank his cup, whispering in his ear as she did so—

"It's a shilling a-week extra. Only Mr. Eddrup and Cap'en Bowker has it."

Presently Mr. Eddrup got up, and stole out of the room. Frank saw him cross the square, and disappear in one of the streets on the other side.

"He always goes out at eight, every night, and comes home at eleven," said Captain Bowker.

"What is he?"

Captain Bowker evaded the question.

"He's great company for me. If it warn't for him, Skimp's would be as dull as my old cabin in the Doldrums. I should go to live at Poplar, where I've got chums. You never went a long sea voyage, I suppose?"

"No longer than from Newhaven to Dieppe."

"Ah! then you've got to find out what solitude means. Be a skipper, sir, and you'll know. They look up to us, sir, and envy our position. It's natural, they should." He spoke as if he was an admiral at least. "But it isn't all sailing with the sou'-west trade wind aft. Some of us drink. That's bad. Now, beyond my four or five goes of grog of a night, a pannikin or so of a morning, another about noon, and one or two after dinner, I never did drink. I'm not one of your everlasting nippers. And what's the consequence, sir? Here I am,

sound in limb at fifty-five. Pensioned off by my noble firm after forty years' service, and happy for the rest of my days."

He paused, and rang the bell.

"Bring the usual, Mary, and two tumblers. You shall have a glass of my rum to-night, Mr. Melliship. What was I a-saying?"

"You were saying that you were going to be happy for the rest of your days. So I suppose you are going to take a wife, Captain Bowker."

"A wife! The Lord forbid! No, sir, I did that once—fifteen years ago—once too often. Ah! well—she's dead; at least, I suppose so." He turned quite pale, and beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. "Well, let that pass. What kept me from drink was, that I had a resource which is given to few men. Do you compose, sir?"

"Compose? Music?"

"No—music—nonsense? Anybody can make music. Verses, sir—immortal verses. That's what I used to spend my time in doing when I was below in the cabin. Now here"—he pulled a folded and frayed piece of paper out of his pocket "here is a copy I made in my last voyage home. Read it, and tell me candidly what you think of it."

Frank opened it. It began—

> "'Tis fearful, when the running gear is taut,
> And creaking davits yield a frail support."

"Hem! Rhyme rather halts here, doesn't it? Shall I read the rest at my leisure, Captain Bowker?"

"No, no—no time like the present. Give me hold, young man. Now, then—stand by—here's the rum. So, sit steady, and listen."

He read his composition. Frank listened as one in a dream. What next? To sing in a music hall, to live at Skimp's, to sit at the same table with Captain Hamilton, to hear Captain Bowker read his verses: this was not encouraging. He would have to go to the Palace in the morning, to rehearsal. After all, it is necessary to live. At least, one would be able to pay one's way on three guineas a-week.

> "So, like the Doldrums' calm, his onward way
> Is checked who dares thy laws to disobey."

It was the termination of Captain Bowker's poem.

Frank woke up.

"Very good indeed, Captain Bowker. The last lines especially—very good. They remind me of Pope.

'So, like the Doldrums' onward way, his calm
Is checked who dares to—' "

"Not quite right," said the divine bard, with a smile. "But you are not a sailor. Shall I read it again?"

"No, don't—pray don't."

"I won't. Let us talk."

That meant, "Let me talk."

Frank lay back in his easy chair, and dreamed of Grace, and the pleasant country-side. How was he to win her;—how to pay off those debts? It was not a hopeful reverie. There are times when the veil of illusion falls off. It is at best but a fog, most common in the morning of life, and extremely pretty when the sun shines upon it. It was fallen now. Frank measured the distance between himself and Grace, and saw that it was widening every day.

Captain Bowker recalled him. He was maundering on:—

"—when I commanded the *Merry Moonshine*, in the Chinese coolie trade, running to Trinidad. It was an anxious time, because we had four hundred of them aboard, and not too much rice. They used to murder each other—ten, a dozen or so—every night. That lessened the numbers."

"What did they do that for?"

"What do men always fight about? Then we had bad weather—terrible bad weather: got on the edge of a cyclone. We had the coolies battened down 'tween decks; and what with the noise of the storm, and the cries of them wild cats, and the mainmast going by the board, I do assure you it was as much as I could do to get that poem finished. As it was, it wasn't really finished till I got home—for there was a lot more unpleasantness. We put in at Allegoey Bay; and directly the coolies caught sight of land, I'm blest if forty or fifty didn't chuck themselves out of the ports and overboard, to swim ashore. I do not remember," he said, stroking his nose—"I do not remember hearing that any of them got there.. There's sharks off that coast, you know. But think of the loss it was to me!"

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH.

AFTER walking through a number of narrow and dark passages, Frank found himself at last in the North London Palace of Amusement and Aristocratic Lounge.

Dingy and dirty by daylight it appeared.

Plenty of light — to show the tawdry, gas and smoke-tarnished state of the decorations—came in through a lantern in the great domed roof; for the place had once been a daylight exhibition—a sort of superior Polytechnic, started at the same time as

the mechanics' institutes, whither it was thought the people would eagerly flock to improve their minds. Mr. Leweson's company could therefore rehearse comfortably without the gas—except on very dark and foggy days.

The features of the building struck Frank as something familiar. His father and the flavour of Bath buns flashed upon him ; for memory mixes incongruous elements as old recollections pour upon us. He had once been taken there as a little boy, when what was now a music hall had been the Lyceum. The place had now, however, tumbled down from its high estate, and in its fall had ruined half a dozen speculators before the genius of a Leweson made it pay.

Frank looked round. It was the same place—he was sure of that ; though how changed was all about him !

He remembered the great, bare hall, with half a dozen dreary electric machines ; the galleries, round which geological specimens were arranged ; its side wings, where were displayed such objects as ancient British pottery, specimens of early type, botanical collections, and other dry and improving things. He remembered how he had been led round, wearily yawning, with a party of girls who began by yawn-

ing too, and ended by snapping at each other. All the time there had been the buzz of a lecturer's voice, as he addressed an audience consisting of an uncle and two miserable nephews, on the more recent improvements in machinery employed in the manufacture of cotton fabrics. And he remembered how his heart lightened up when they came to a refreshment stall, and everybody had a cake.

He rubbed his eyes, and looked round. Yes—it was the same place; but where the electric machines had stood was now a stage, where the geological collection had formerly been was now a row of private boxes. The apparatus had all disappeared: only the refreshment-room remained, and this was vastly increased, and improved.

"Here we are," said Mr. Leweson. "This is where the loonatics come every night to stare, and listen, and drink. Amuse yourself by looking for half an hour or so."

"I have been here before," Frank began.

"Everybody comes here—it's one of the sights of London," said Mr. Leweson, interrupting him; "and the loonatics——"

It was Frank's turn to interrupt.

"I mean years ago, when it used to be called the Lyceum. I was a boy then."

"Phyoo!" the proprietor whistled. "Ah! quite another thing. It was a Limited Li Company. It would have smashed 'em all up instead of being smashed itself, if it hadn't been. It has been lots of things since then. Nobody made it pay till I took it in hand. Mark me," continued Mr. Leweson, with great gravity, and in his deepest voice—

"Well, sir."

"That'll be the end of that round place they're building at Kensington."

"What, the Albert Hall?" cried Frank.

"Yes, certain to come to it—only a question of time. Be a place just like this, and with the Horticultural Gardens at the back to walk out into and dance in the summer—Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and Cremorne thrown into one would be nothing to it. I'd give—I'd give—there, I don't know what I wouldn't give a year for that place, with the gardens thrown in; and pay the biggest dividend that ever was paid by anything in this world before."

"But, my dear sir," Frank began, shaking his head.

"Ah, you may laugh: and I may not, and I dare say I shall not, live to see it, but that is the future of those two places, as sure as eggs are eggs—take my word for it. But, there, I must leave you and

attend to my business—they want me. Go anywhere you like, only not on the stage just yet—you'd be in the way. The new ballet is just coming on."

Mr. Leweson left Frank in front of the stage, and disappeared himself down a trap-door in the orchestra.

Frank took a seat in a box near the stage, and looked about him.

The scene was new to him, and, apart from the novelty, was interesting in itself.

The curtain was up. It revealed an immense stage, crowded with children, girls, and men. The wings and drops were representations of the foliage of a forest of palms. In the background was a vast gold fan, which at night unfolded and displayed Titania, Queen of the Fairies, reclining among her attendant sprites and fays.

In front, close to the wire fencing of the footlights, stood a little, mean table, covered with slips of manuscript. At the table sat the chief of the orchestra, making annotations on his score with a red chalk pencil, sometimes from the manuscripts, sometimes without reference to them. By the conductor's side stood an iron music stand, three empty rush-bottomed chairs, and a fiddle in a case.

The rehearsal had not yet begun, and the girls were collected in little knots, always breaking up and re-forming; chattering together like so many grasshoppers, and laughing perpetually, at nothing at all, and just out of the irrepressible gaiety of their hearts. At the sides of the proscenium were two sheets of looking-glass. These were a great source of attraction, and never idle for a second. Constantly, one or two of the girls would leave the rest, and, going in front of the glass, execute a few choregic gyrations quite gravely, no one taking the least notice of them, nor they of any one else. It was quaint to see them staidly pirouetting, gyrating, and posturing before these great glasses, each one totally regardless of the rest. The private practice and self-examination before a woman's most faithful confessor accomplished, the young ladies would retire to their friends, and join in the never-ending chatter. Directly they left the mirrors, their places were seized by a lot of tiny children—girls—who, in ragged dresses, mere little children of the gutter, solemnly ambled up and down in front of the glass, put out their chubby little legs, and waved their little red arms. They never tired of looking at themselves. When their elder sisters came and turned them out, they fled like wasps from a honey

pot. The moment the coast was clear, back they all came, tumbling over each other in their eagerness to be in the front, and began once more the children's imitation of their elders' vanities.

Frank looked on at this lively scene with great interest. He had never seen a rehearsal before. From what he had heard of the young ladies of the ballet, he had been accustomed to regard them as melancholy victims of mistaken art—persons who were compelled by want to sacrifice their self-respect, and go through a nightly course of public posturing for the admiration of a foolish crowd. Now he met them in flesh and blood, he found all his original ideas knocked on the head. So far from having no self-respect, they appeared to be full of it; so far from having any sense of humiliation, they evidently delighted in their calling. Of course, it will be seen that Frank was exceedingly inexperienced. At the same time, had he been the most hardened old roué that ever walked behind the scenes, he could not but be struck with the natural gaiety and light-heartedness of the girls. It was all real: no affectation or false semblance. They were all happy, all laughing, all chattering, all dancing, running, and capering about the stage.

The men and boys kept at the back. They were an exceedingly shady-looking lot. As it afterwards appeared, their business in the ballet was to come in and make gestures, to fill up the back ground, to stand in attitudes, and perform other easy and elementary parts which belong to dramatic representation.

The girls had nothing to say to them ; and they, for their part, never spoke to the girls, but kept to themselves under Titania's great fan.

A little commotion among the crowd. It opened, and made a way for Mr. Leweson, the master of the ballet, and his two assistants. The three professors of the art of dancing were French —that was patent at half a glance. The same sallow, shaven cheeks, the same cropped black moustache, the same height, belonged to all. As Mrs. Partington would say, they might all three have been twins. And this natural resemblance was heightened by their all appearing in bluish pilot jackets, rather tight-fitting black trousers, and cloth boots.

Mr. Leweson signed to a pale man to open the fiddle case, and begin.

"We've got lots of work to get through, Mr. Sauerhäring" — the master of the ballet was an

Alsatian by birth—"so let us get on. I want to see that ballet of butterflies perfect this afternoon."

"M'sieur, you shall see it.

"It's a very stiff job."

"Bah!—pooh!" dissented Sauerhäring. "It—is—noth—thing."

"Glad to hear it."

"Psha! You shall see it pairfect, while you say one, two." He looked at the fiddler. "Go on," he said.

His assistants vanished among the girls, when they were seen at intervals among the crowds of coryphées, setting good example. The fiddler struck up, and the ballet commenced. The girls were dressed in all kinds of costumes. Some had their plain walking dresses of stuff or black silk, only with their bonnets and jackets off; some had the "bodies" of the dress—the skirts being removed—leaving them in soiled muslins; some wore a kind of short petticoat; one or two were in what theatrical critics call page dress, but what the girls call "shapes," such as they would appear in at night. They all wore silk stockings, some of them having on a kind of red gaiters, which Frank took to be elastic, and intended to strengthen the limb. He had noticed, previous to the rehearsal,

one or two artists more conscientious than the rest engaged in diligently rubbing their ankles and the circumjacent regions. At first he could not make out the reason of this manœuvre, but was at length reminded of Lillie Bridge and professional runners. Then he knew what it was meant for.

"Go an," said the ballet master, pronouncing the word as if he were an Irishman—"go an, lad-ees."

They went "an" in that vast hall, with one spectator—Frank—and to the scraping of the solitary fiddle. It marked time; but, for anything else, a battalion of Guards might as well have marched to the sounds of one penny whistle, or a cathedral choir have been accompanied by a Jew's harp. They were learning the figures of the butterflies' ballet, and began the first with great vigour and energy.

But they were not right about it.

M. Sauerhäring threw out his arms, and trilled a prolonged guttural "Ah———h!"

"Bah!—pooh!—phit!—tush!—psha!" he cried in a string, and then gave a "klick," like a whole cab rank starting in pursuit of a double fare.

The music stopped. The ladies laughed. The professor said—

"Stupeed! this is the step."

Then he capered solemnly in front of them.

"One, two ; one, two—lal-lal-la, lal-lal-la ; one, two ; three, four."

Behind him, a long file of coryphées imitated his movements. To Frank, Sauerhäring's limbs seemed to be of india-rubber as he shook them from side to side.

"One, two—one, two. Now, again."

The odd thing being that they never once stopped chattering to each other and laughing.

They were admirably drilled. Not one but kept her eye fixed upon the master—that is, one eye, the other being given up to seeing how the other girls were getting on. It was wonderful to see them catching the combinations, and patiently working them out. As for patience, it was difficult to say whether the girls were more patient or the master more painstaking.

Presently the chief of the orchestra crossed the stage to M. Sauerhäring. Directly the master turned to speak to him, the girls began to romp about, one after the other darting from the ranks, and executing a pirouette on her own account in the centre of the stage, making believe to be for once a première danseuse. Then the master turned round, and order was re-established.

Presently came the children's turn. A ragged regiment they were by daylight; at night, butterflies and moths—all spangles and gauze. Now, with muddy stockings and shoes full of holes, giving M. Sauerhäring and his aides de camp a vast deal more trouble to teach them one figure than their elder sisters would do in learning a dozen. Their drilling lasted half an hour at least; and at least once in two minutes the indefatigable and, as it appeared, ubiquitous Sauerhäring stopped fiddle and children with his guttural, tremulant "Ah—h—h!" and reeled off the five expressions of discontent he had learned from a phrase book of the English tongue in the paternal orchard in his own Alsace—

"Bah!—pooh!—phit!—tush!—psha!"

To him they were a word in five syllables, and he ejaculated them to a sort of tune, as an angry vocalist might sound his "Do, re, mi, fa, sol."

Among the children, one little mite of about six years attracted Frank's attention. She had been the most assiduous while she was on the stage in ambling up and down before the mirrors. Now she led off the train of children with a precision and solemnity that were most edifying, executing her simple steps most carefully and conscientiously.

The moment she was free again, she ran off to the looking-glass, and practised them over again, with many curtseys and salutes, wonderful to see. That child will rise and be heard of in her profession, unless some unlucky accident cuts her off.

While this branch of the corps de ballet were practising figures and groupings, there came upon the scene one of the principal dancers, dressed as if for the evening, but without any flowers or jewels, just as she appears in the initial letter to this chapter. She walked across the front of the stage, regarding the lower members of the profession with that stare that sees nothing, common enough among the gentle daughters of England's aristocracy. A mere ballet girl, a troupe of ballet girls, what could they possibly be in the eyes of Mdlle. Goldoni, from the opera house of Milan? In her hand she bore a small watering-pot, with which she sprinkled the boards in front of the looking-glass on the left, took possession of it, and proceeded to practise by herself. First, she turned round on the left toe, with the right leg a foot and a half above her head; then she performed the same manœuvre with her right toe and left leg; then she placed her foot as high up on the gilded pillar of the proscenium as she

could, and kept it there; then she began arching her feet before the glass; then she went over the whole performance again—never disturbed by the others, who took no manner of notice of her, and never herself taking the least notice of the rest;—all the while looking in the glass with a sort of curiosity, as if the legs belonged to somebody else. One or two other people, including a lady of immense proportions, in black velvet, came in, and sat on chairs in front of the stage. The little children romped round the house, and vaulted about over the backs of the seats. The unhappy-looking youths, in felt hats and greasy coats, at the back went through the semblance of what they were about to perform at night in spangles and hodden suits. The assistant ballet master capered and danced all over the stage. The girls went through their drill again and again. No one got tired. The melancholy fiddler, whose strains produced a profoundly saddening effect on Frank, played on with the pertinacity and monotony of an organ grinder. The conductor of the orchestra made his notes on the music; the big lady in black velvet gazed on unweariedly; the manager, Mr. Leweson, came and went, bringing his big head upon the stage and taking it off again at intervals.

At last he came round to Frank's box with a portfolio in his hand.

"Always a lot to do with the production of a new ballet. Now let us talk while they finish the rehearsal. You see, Mr. Melliship, the loonatics who come here like a ballet: not that they care, bless you, what it's like, or what it means, so long as there's plenty of short skirts on the stage. But it must be a Spectàrcle! Another thing the loonatics that frequent this miserable Palace of Humbug like is the sight of somebody running the risk of breaking their bones. So we've got a trapeze rigged up, as you see. But they must needs have a woman, so we've got the Divine Giulia—Giulia Silvani—to perform with her father. I daresay they'll be round presently. Comic songs of course they must have. We've got the Inexpressible Jones, and the Incomparable and Aristocratic Arthur De Vere. They only come at night, of course. Beautiful specimens of the aristocracy, both of them—but they go down with the loonatics."

He stopped, and began to look about in his portfolio.

He produced a manuscript.

"Now, with a singer like yourself, there are only

two lines open. You must give up altogether the notion that the British loonatic wants music. He doesn't. He wants sentiment to make him cry, and patriotism to warm up his puny little heart. I'm ashamed of him, Mr. Mellishipp—I am, indeed. But what can I do? Here I am, after advertising you yesterday in all the papers, and sending sandwiches up and down the streets to-day——"

"Advertising me!"

"Yes. Look here: wonder you didn't see it as you came along."

He called one of the children, and sent her for a bill. She presently returned with a flaming poster.

NORTH LONDON PALACE OF AMUSEMENT AND ARISTOCRATIC LOUNGE.

IN ADDITION TO THE

GALAXY OF TALENT

Already engaged, the Manager has great pleasure in announcing that he has secured, for a short time only, the services of the

NEW AND GREAT ANGLO-ITALIAN TENOR,

SIGNOR CIPRIANO.

The Signor, who has never sung before in England, but who is well known to possess the Finest Tenor Voice in the World, will Sing

TO-NIGHT,

AND UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE,

THREE BALLADS.

EVERY EVENING.

At Half-past Eight and Half-past Nine.

Across this announcement was a coloured strip, with "To-night" upon it.

Frank read it with a mixed feeling of annoyance and amusement. After all it didn't matter. His new grand name was better, at any rate, than his own—if he must appear before a British audience.

"I suppose it's all right," he said, doubtfully, handing it back.

"Of course it is; but the thing is, what you're to sing. Now, I asked my man"—he meant a musical understrapper who composed songs for him, words and music, at a pound a-piece—"I asked my man to knock me off a little thing in imitation of the Christy's songs of domestic pathos—you know—like 'slam the door loudly, for mother's asleep,' 'Touch the place softly, my pretty Louise,' 'Father, come home, for mother is tight';—charming songs, you know, with a chorus soft and whispered at the end, so as to bring the tears in the people's eyes.

Now, what do you think he brought me this morning. Read that."

He looked at Frank curiously, while the latter read it and laughed.

It was a song based on one of the humblest and most ordinary topics of "domestic pathos," and ran thus :—

"He will catch it from his mother,
For the widow's heart is low,
And beneath the weeping willows,
Still her wayward child will go.
O'er the river course the shadows—
He has spoiled his boots and hat—
While the sunset lights the meadows,
For his mother spank the brat."

"'Vulgar and coarse'? I knew you'd say so," said the Bighead. "It's a pity, too. My man told me it was written in direct imitation of the great original—with whispered chorus, and all. See what a capital effect it would have. You in the centre, head held down in attitude of listening—so; voices behind—unseen, you know—'for his mother'—'for his mother'—'for his mother'—dying away, with a harp obligato to follow."

"I'll sing it if you like," said Frank. "What does it matter, if the people like it?"

"Ah, we must follow the loonatics, not lead 'em,

as I should wish," said Mr. Leweson, sighing. "Well, well, we'll have it; though it's a shame—it's a shame to ask a man with your voice to sing such a song. Now for the second—'The Bay of Biscay.' It will suit you well. They'll encore that; or you may sing 'The Death of Nelson.' And now to try the room."

He led the way to the stage, had a piano wheeled in, sat down, and directed Frank where to stand—giving him, at the same time, a few hints on the art of bowing to an assemblage of British loonatics.

The acoustic properties of the place were splendid. Frank felt as if he had never sung in his life before, as he heard his own voice filling the great building, and echoing in the roof.

"What do you think of that?" whispered Mr. Leweson to the conductor.

"How long have you got him for?"

"Two months' agreement first. I'm going to make him sign directly."

"How much?"

"Three guineas."

"Make it six months. You won't keep him a day beyond his time."

Frank finished.

"How was that Mr. Leweson?"

"Very good—very good. A little softer at the finish: don't be afraid they won't hear you. I'll have the chorus all right for you by the time you come this evening. Now for 'The Death of Nelson.' You may make the glasses ring, if you like. Come in Patty, my dear. Where's your father?"

This was to a new comer—a singularly pretty, modest-looking girl. He did not wait for an answer to his question, but began at once.

Frank finished the song, and Mr. Leweson clapped his hands in applause.

"That'll bring the house down, if anything will. Bravo, Mr.—I mean, Signor Cipriano, you know. Now, look here—I'm not going to have you encored, and spoiling your voice, to please a lot of loonatics, so they needn't think it. To-night, you may do it. I shall go on myself, and make a speech after it. You'll hear me. Patty, this is our new singer—a very different sort to the rest, as you'll find. Signor, this is the Divine Giulia Silvani—only at home we call her Patty Silver; and she's worth her weight in gold, I can tell you. Here's her father."

Frank took off his hat, and shook hands with the girl. Her hands were rough and hard, her fingers thick—he noticed that as she stood gloveless on

the stage. But her face was wonderfully soft and delicate in expression: one of those faces—the features not too good, and perhaps common-place in character—which one meets from time to time in the London streets;—not the face of a lady at all, but, at the same time, a lovable and good face. She was different to the ballet girls, somehow—had none of their restlessness, did not laugh, did not jump about before the glass: stood quietly beside the piano, and just listened and waited. She was the female trapezist, and with her father performed the Miraculous Flying Leap for Life every night. Her little brother completed the talented Salvani Family; and, though yet of tender years, was admitted to a trifling performance on a small trapeze of his own, from which he could not fall more than twenty or thirty feet or so—a mere trifle to a child of ten.

The family were special favourites of the manager, for some reason or other. His big head had a big heart connected with it, as more than one in the place had found out.

After singing his songs, and receiving the suggestions of his employer, Frank went with him to his private room. A paper was lying on the table.

"That's your agreement, Mr. Mellishp. You

pledge yourself to sing for me, and only me, for two months, at a fixed salary of three guineas a-week, at least three ballads or songs every night. I introduce you to the public, and have my profit out of the small salary you will get. You see, Mr. Melliship, I'm a plain man. I like your voice. I like your appearance. I am making terms advantageous to myself, but not bad for you. And if you were to go to anybody in London, you wouldn't get better for a first engagement. My conductor advised me to nail you down for six months, but I keep to my original terms. Treat me well, Mr. Melliship, and I'll treat you well. So there we are; and, if you'll sign, a pint of champagne and a dry biscuit will help us along."

Frank drank the champagne, signed his name, and went away, free until eight.

He dined at Mrs. Skimp's, where old Mr. Eddrup was, as usual, made the butt of "Captain" Hamilton's wit. After dinner he smoked a pipe in the garden of the square; and then, as the time was fast approaching, he dressed himself with considerable care, and walked to the Palace.

The place was crowded. Nearly every man had a glass before him, and a pipe or a cigar in his

mouth. There were constant cries of "Waiter," constant popping of corks. The smell of tobacco was overpowering. The heat and the gas made the place almost intolerable. Frank stood at the side wings while a ballet went on—not that which he had seen rehearsed, but a simpler one, intended to open the evening.

"After this, the Inexpressible Jones. After him, you," said Mr. Leweson. "That's to take him down a few pegs. He thinks he's got a tenor. With a voice like a cow."

The Inexpressible sang. He was encored. He sang again. They wanted to encore him a second time. It was a charming pastoral, relating how he, the I. J., had been walking one evening in the fields with an umbrella, and had there met a young lady belonging to the same exalted rank among the aristocracy as himself; how he had held a conversation with her under his umbrella; how she had promised to meet him the next evening, provided he came with his umbrella; how he had kept his appointment, with his umbrella, and how she had not. It was a comic song, acted with an umbrella, so true to life that the "loonatics" shrieked with laughter.

When the laughter had quite subsided, it was Frank's turn to go on.

Mr. Leweson was below among the audience, contemplating his patrons with an air of undisguised contempt. He was the first person Frank saw in the mass of heads beneath and in front of him.

For a moment, he trembled and lost his nerve. Only for a moment. As the piano struck up, he managed to see the words that were swimming before him, and plunged at once into his ballad of the domestic affections.

The chorus was more than admirable—it was superb: an invisible chorus, in soft voices, murmuring the refrain like an echo—

"For his mother—for his mother—for his mother;"

till the people cried at the pathos.

"The loonatics," he heard the manager growling to himself.

The applause was tremendous. He retired amid a general yell of "'core—'core!" and reappeared a moment after with flushed cheeks—for even the approbation of "loonatics" is something—to sing "The Death of Nelson."

Frank went home that night satisfied, if not happy. He was a success at last—if only a success at three guineas a-week. He prayed fervently that no old friends would come to detect him. If only he could preserve his incognito, all would be well.

He reckoned only on old friends. He had forgotten new acquaintances.

The very next day, at dinner, after a general whispering at the upper end of the table, which Mr. Eddrup interpreted to mean an organized attack upon himself, Captain Hamilton turned to him, and openly congratulated him on his success the preceding evening at the North London Palace of Amusement.

"Of course," said the gallant officer, "it was an unexpected pleasure to see, in the person of Signor Cipriano, a gentleman who does us the favour to dine at our humble table."

Frank reddened, and could find nothing to say.

Mr. Eddrup answered for him. It was the first time the old man had ever been known to speak.

"I congratulate you," he said to Frank, "on the possession of a talent which enables you to take honest work. Believe me, sir, all work is honest."

"Bravo, old Eddrup!" shouted the medical student. "We've made him speak at last. I

always knew he was one of the most eloquent orators going."

Frank turned with flushing cheeks.

"At all events," he said, "it is better to sing at a public place than to—to—"

"To what, sir?" said the student.

"Singing cad!" escaped the Captain's lips, in tones very clearly audible.

Frank half rose from his seat, and turned towards the Captain.

"Better than loafing about in billiard-rooms, and on suburban racecourses, Captain Hamilton."

There was a dead silence.

"After dinner, sir," said Captain Hamilton, after a pause, "we must have a word together."

"And me, too," said the medical student, with disregard for grammar.

"Stick to 'em," whispered Captain Bowker. "Stick to 'em. They're only curs. I'll see fair play."

After dinner, Captain Hamilton, none of the rest leaving the room, came up to Frank as he stood in the window.

"Sir, you have insulted me."

"Probably."

It was said calmly, but Frank's lips were trembling.

"Sir, you must give me satisfaction."

"Take it, then," shouted the young man, striking out with his left arm.

The Captain fell—and did not get up again.

"Oh! gentlemen—gentlemen," cried Mrs. Skimp, running before Frank—"don't fight—oh! pray don't fight! He owes me for six weeks," she whispered.

"I said he was a loafer—a welcher. I know he is. I have seen him ducked in a horsepond before to-day," said Frank, who was recovering his calmness.

The others all burst out laughing, except the medical student, who thought that perhaps his turn was coming next.

The Captain rose slowly, but with dignity.

"This," he said, "will not end here. You will hear from me to-morrow."

He was leaving the room, the medical student going with him.

"Stop," said Frank. "There is something else to be said. Both yesterday and to-day—and, I believe, always—there has been made a series of attacks, personal, insulting, and cadish, on an old gentleman of perfectly inoffensive habits — Mr. Eddrup. The two principal offenders are you two

—Captain Hamilton and you—whatever your name is"—he pointed to the medical student. "Now, as I, for one, decline to belong to those who wilfully insult an old man, I intend to take his quarrel upon myself. Whoever insults Mr. Eddrup, henceforth insults me. Now, Captain Hamilton, and you other, you may go to the devil."

They went out.

Mrs. Skimp was the only one who regretted the incident.

"Six weeks due from the Captain," she moaned, "and four from the other."

"Sir," said Captain Bowker, wringing Frank's hand, "I'm proud of you. You're a good fellow, sir—a good fellow. I wish I could do something for you."

Frank laughed.

"You can," he said. "You can come and hear me sing 'The Death of Nelson,' if you like."

"By the Lord, I will," said the Captain. "I haven't been to a place of amusement for ten years. I'll go to-night."

Mr. Eddrup said nothing. In his usual quiet and methodical manner, he stepped out of the room, and went upstairs.

In many cheap boarding-houses there is a Père

Goriot, young or old. In very few is there a man to be found with courage to stand up and protect a butt from the assaults of his enemies.

That night, Captain Hamilton went out, and came back no more. His effects, when examined, were found to consist principally of one trunk, locked—filled with stones wrapped in newspapers.

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH.

AT an early hour on the morning after his "first appearance," Frank awoke with strangely mingled feelings of disgust and pride. Mr. Leweson's loonatics had cheered him to the skies: that was something. On the other hand, to have been cheered by loonatics was not in itself, after the first surprise, an exhilarating memory. He got up, cursing his fate.

He went down to the palace, after breakfast, in the

gloomiest frame of mind. He found the same ballet rehearsal going on, only the second time it was not by any means so interesting, having lost its novelty. Ballet girls, he was able to remark, romantic as the profession appears to outsiders, possess much of the commonplace nature of the untutored feminine animal. He speculated on their probable ambition, on the subjects which occupied their minds, and exercised their intellects. Subsequent investigation, followed by discovery, taught him in time that they never do think at all, except about the means of getting dress, and have no intellects to exercise. Mr. Leweson was in his office, but too busy to see him, only sending out a note that the performance of last night might be repeated if he wished; if not, he only had to select his own songs.

Frank felt quite indifferent as to what songs he sang, and so was turning away to leave the place, when he saw the pretty girl to whom he had been introduced the day before—the Divine Giulia. She was with her father, superintending the arrangement of certain trapeze ropes for a new feat they were to perform that evening. Her dress was changed. She had on the singular costume which was invented, I suppose, when female gymnasts

first came into fashion—something like the "page" dress of the stage. The Divine Giulia was attired in Turkish trousers—which disappeared at night—a crimson scarf, and what I have reason to believe is called a chemisette. Her hair—brown, full, and wavy—was gathered up at the back of her head in such rich masses that no chignon was necessary. Her father was also dressed in the uniform of his profession, but without the spangles which covered him in the evening. With them was a little boy, the youthful Joey, also attired in the family costume. Frank stayed to look.

"May I look on while you practise?" he asked, shaking hands with the acrobat and his daughter.

"Of course you may, Mr.—Signor."

"Signor Cipriano, father," said Patty.

"My name is Melliship," said Frank, reddening.

"You may help us, too," said the girl. "Set this mattress straight. So. Now lay this one along the tables. That is right. Ready, father?"

One of the men regularly employed stood at the bar, to set it swinging. They were to fly, one after the other—the girl first—across the house, swinging from one trapeze to the next, and landing on a little platform at the end: a common feat enough,

complicated by what the playbills called a summersault in "mid-air" by the father.

Silvani, père, was a stout, strong-built man, about forty years of age, or a little over. The muscles showed through his tight fleshings like rope bands.

"Fancy having to assist your governor in turning summersaults," thought Frank.

It was a question whether the ropes should not be lengthened by a foot or so, which would naturally increase the distance to be traversed, but lessen the danger. Mr. Silver gave it against the longer length.

"But you may kill yourself," said Frank, "for want of that extra foot."

"I don't think so. After all, a man can only die once. Patty, my dear, you're not afraid?"

She shook her head merrily, and mounted the ladder. Frank trembled as she stood at the top—slight, graceful, slender—poising herself like a bird on the wing. Her father mounted after her, and took another pair of ropes, standing behind her.

She gave a sign: the man set the trapeze swinging, and Patty let herself go. The instant she touched the first bar, her father followed, catching it as it swung back when she left it. In a moment,

they were standing side by side on a platform in front of the first circle.

"Not quite steady enough. We must do it again."

"No, don't," cried Frank—"don't. Surely once is enough."

The girl laughed, and climbed again. Frank was standing on the mattress at the far end of the house, nearly under the landing-place—that is to say, close under the dress circle. The feat looked a great deal more dangerous in an empty theatre, by daylight, than when the gas was lit, and the place crammed with spectators.

Now, whether his nervousness communicated itself to Patty, I know not; but when she left the two rings, and should have caught the first bar, she missed it. Frank rushed forward, and caught her by the shoulders, just as she would have fallen heavily on the mattresses.

The weight of a girl of eighteen, though she be a trapezist in full training, is no small matter—particularly when the velocity of her flight is taken into consideration. The momentum of a body in motion is represented, in applied mathematics, as a quantity composed of the mass multiplied by the velocity—which is, to the outer world, much as if

one were to say pigs multiplied by candles. You will realize what is meant if anything heavy falls upon you. Frank fell back, with Patty upon him. She was up in an instant, unhurt.

Her father, seeing the accident as he flew through the air, kept tight hold of his rings, and swung backwards and forwards until he could safely alight.

"Why, Patty," he cried, "I've never known you do such a thing before."

The girl was up in a moment—shaken, but not hurt. Frank was not so fortunate. Her head butting full upon his nose, caused that member to bleed: a prosaic ending to a deed of some heroism and skill—for he caught her like a cricket ball, only with the softest and most delicate handling possible, just as if he had always been practising the art of catching trapeze girls so as not to hurt them.

Mr. Lewesson, too, came running up. He was just in time to witness the accident.

"Are you hurt, Patty—are you hurt?"

"Not a bit—not a bit:" her lip was trembling in the effort to suppress an hysterical sob. "I should have been if it had not been for Mr. Mellishp, though. We ought to ask him if he is hurt."

Frank was holding his handkerchief to his nose,

and only shook his head, to intimate that the damage done was such as could easily be repaired.

"Good Heaven!" cried Mr. Leweson; "and you might have flown straight against the woodwork. Mr. Melliship, it was splendid—splendidly done, sir."

"Well," said Mr. Silver, "as nobody's hurt, and we've got to do it to-night, I suppose we'd better try it again, Patty."

"No—no," began Frank.

"Young gentleman," said Mr. Silver, "please don't interfere with our professional work."

"You are not too much shaken, Patty?" interposed the manager.

"Not shaken a bit. Now, father, we'll do it this time."

She ran up the ladder lightly with her rings, flew through the air from bar to bar, and arrived at the landing-stage with the precision of a bird, followed by her sire.

"Now, there," said Mr. Leweson, "is a splendid creature for you. Now you see why I wanted you to go on the trapeze with Giulia. Think of the Triple Act that I had in my mind—Signor Silvani holding the rings; three bars, each two feet lower than the other; on the Signor's shoulders

you would stand, Giulia on yours. The flight through the air: the first bar for Giulia, the second for you, the third for the father of the family. The most magnificent idea in acrobatism ever conceived. But there, if it can't be, it can't, of course. Now, then, Patty, hoist up the boy, and get your practice done."

He walked aside, with his hand in Frank's arm, while the child went through his performances.

"Mr. Mellishp," he said, abruptly, "you are a gentleman, that is clear. I dare say an army man, now."

"No—I told you—I am a Cambridge man."

"Ah!—well. But there are different sorts of gentlemen, you see. Now, I think more goes to make a gentleman than knowing how to eat, and talk, and dress, and behave. I know the breed is rare; but there is a sort of gentleman in this country who does not run after every pretty face he meets, fancying that every pretty girl is his natural prey. I say there is that sort of gentleman in the world, and I should be very glad to think you belong to the kind, Mr. Mellishp. That's a long preamble; but what I mean is this —excuse my plain speaking—but I don't want my little Patty humbugged, and I won't have it, sir, I

say—I won't have it, by any one. There—there—I'm a fool."

"You can trust me," said Frank. "I am not likely either to fall in love with her, or she with me."

"Humph!" growled the man with the big head, looking curiously at him. "I don't know that. Well—well—I've said what I wanted to, and you are not angry; so it is all right. Come and have some fizz, Patty, my girl. After your shake, it will do you good."

They all went to the manager's room, when he produced a bottle of champagne, which they discussed together. If Mr. Leweson had a weakness, it was for champagne. Patty Silver shared it. Champagne was the one thing connected with the department of the interior which Patty cared for.

"Very odd," thought Frank. "Here's the manager giving champagne to a family of acrobats. Wonder if they always do it at music halls."

I believe, as a rule, that acrobats are not so well treated by managers.

In this particular case there were reasons why Mr. Leweson was especially kind to his talented Silvani Family. It is a story which hardly belongs to us. In the years gone by, there had been a

forlorn little Israelite boy, whose father and mother died in a far-off land, leaving him alone to the care of strangers. None of his own people were in that American town. Then a Christian man, a blacksmith by trade, took him in, and housed him. The Christian man was Signor Silvani's father; the little Jew was Mr. Emmanuel Leweson. Years went on. The Jew became a musician, a singer, a composer; the Christians went down in the world; and the whirligig of time brought them all together again — Harry Silver an acrobat — Emmanuel Leweson the manager and part proprietor—principal shareholder — of the great North London Palace of Amusement.

All this is irrelevant, save that it explains why the manager produced his champagne, and why he gave his warnings to Frank in language so emphatic.

The family resumed the ordinary attire of humble British citizens, and Frank walked away with them. They lived in a small house, in one of those streets of gloomy small houses which abound in Islington. Patty nodded good-bye to him, and ran up the steps with her brother, opening the door with a latch key.

"Sir," said her father when she had gone in,

"you saved my daughter's life. What shall I say to thank you?"

"Nothing. Why do you let her do it?"

"We must live. There is nothing dishonest in it. There is not half the risk that you think about it. As for me, I feel almost as safe on the trapeze as you do on the pavement—and so does Patty, for that matter."

"But—but—" Frank hesitated.

"Immodest, you think it is. I don't know, sir—I don't know. There isn't a better girl than my girl in all London, and I defy you to find one. No, I had a great exercise of my conscience before I let her go—only her gifts were too strong. It was a-flying in the face of Providence not to let her take a way which was opened, so to speak, unto her. I laid the matter before my friend, Mr. Eddrup—"

"Eddrup! He that lives at Mrs. Skimp's, in Granville-square?"

"There is only one Mr. Eddrup, young man. The Lord can't spare more than one at a time like him. Do you know him?"

"I live in the same house. Tell me about him."

"Ah, I think you had better find out about him. Well, I laid the matter before him, and he decided

that if the girl liked, and I was always there to look after her, there would be no harm done. If you live in the same house as Mr. Eddrup, young gentleman, you try to talk to him. It was he that showed me the Light."

Frank stared.

"Before I knew Mr. Eddrup, I was clean gone astray, and out of the way altogether. Now, I'm a different man. So is Patty. Do you mean that Mr. Eddrup has never said a word in season to you?"

"Not yet. I've only been in the house two days."

"Then wait; or—if you are not one of those who go about scoffing and sneering at good men—come with me on Sunday evening. But you're a gentleman, Mr. Mellishipp. You go to the Establishment, I suppose."

Frank was too much astonished to find religion in an acrobat to answer.

"There is spiritual food of different kinds," Mr. Silver went on. "I can't get my nourishment in the Church of England. Mind you, I'm not saying a word against it. But I like freedom. I like to have my say if I've got anything to say, and when my heart is full."

"What denomination do you belong to?" asked Frank.

"To none, sir, at present. Why should I? Every man is a priest in his own house. I am of the religion of Abraham. First, I was a Plymouth Brethren; then I was a Primitive Methodists; then I was a Particular Baptists. I've tried the Huntingdon connection, and the Independents, and the Wesleyans; but I don't like them. I don't like any of them. So I stay at home, and read the Book; or else I go and hear Mr. Eddrup on Sunday nights."

"Let me come and talk to you," said Frank. "You shall tell me more about yourself, if you will. I promise, at least, not to scoff and sneer at good things."

"I'm an illiterate man, sir, and you are a gentleman, with education and all that, I dare say. But come when you like."

"Let me come next Sunday evening. You shall give me some tea," said Frank, in his lordly way, as if he were inviting himself to a man's rooms at college.

Mr. Silver looked after him with a puzzled expression, and went up the steps to dinner.

"A gentleman," he said to Patty, "who doesn't

swear and use bad language; who doesn't look as if he got drunk; who doesn't go about with a big pipe in his mouth: who doesn't seem to mind talking about religious things. We don't get many such gentlemen at the Palace of Amusement, do us?"

"But, father," said Patty, laying the things out for dinner, "how does a gentleman come to be singing in the Palace? Gentlemen don't sing, do they, in public places for money?"

"I never heard of it. I will ask Mr. Eddrup. Here's dinner. Joey, say grace."

In these early days, Frank thought it best to go every morning to the Palace. This pleased Mr. Leweson, who had conceived an immense admiration for his new tenor. He showed this by solemnly presenting him with a tenor song of his own composing, which Frank sung, after the fourth night, in place of that song of the domestic affections already quoted. It was not so popular; but that, as Mr. Leweson remarked, was clear proof of its real worth. Had the loonatics applauded, he said he should have felt it his duty, as a musician, to put the song in the fire.

Sunday came, and Frank bethought him of his

invitation to take tea with his new friends. Skimp's dined at four o'clock on Sundays. After dinner, Mrs. Skimp went to church, and her boarders chiefly amused themselves by playing at billiards. To the younger portion, the students, there was something particularly attractive in playing a forbidden game on Sunday ; to the older ones, the chance of picking up a few stray sixpences at pool was quite enough of itself to make them prefer knocking the balls about to smoking pipes all the evening. Besides, they could unite the two amusements. Captain Bowker went to church, to smoothe out his ideas, he said—though no one understood in the least what he meant. I think he liked the quiet of church, where he could abstract his mind from all affairs—spiritual as well as worldly—and compose his verses. Mr. Eddrup, as usual, appeared at dinner, ate in silence what was set before him, and disappeared noiselessly.

Frank found his friends waiting for him—Patty with an extra ribbon. Her father was sitting with a Bible before him—his one book, which he read at all times. On Sundays, when he had a clear day before him, he used to read the Prophecies, applying them to modern times, and working out all problems of the present by their light. He had no

books to help him, unless Swedenborg's "Heaven and Hell" be considered a help. Reading day after day, as he did, the words had come to have to him, as they have done to some theologians, a sort of threefold sense—the historic, the prophetic, and the hidden or inner sense. The pursuit of the last occupied all his thoughts.

The room was poorly furnished, for the family income was but small. Three or four chairs, a table, and a sideboard constituted the whole of it. No servant was apparent, and Patty and Joe were up and down the stairs, bringing up the tea things, laughing and chattering.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Mellishp," said his host. "Now, I call this friendly. Patty, my dear, make haste up with the tea, because it's getting late."

"It's quite ready, father. We were only waiting for Mr. Mellishp."

Watercresses, and bread and butter. Patty pouring out the tea. Her father with his finger on the Bible, enunciating things prophetic.

"I was reading what Ezekiel says about the world in our time, Mr. Mellishp."

"Did Ezekiel write about our time?" asked

Frank, thinking what a pity Patty's hands should be so spoiled by her acrobatic work.

"All time—every time. I can read, sir, the events of to-day and to-morrow in his pages, as plain as I can in a newspaper. I can tell you, if you like to listen, what is going to happen in the world before you die."

"Tell me," said Frank.

Mr. Silver held up his finger, and began. As he went on, in short jerky sentences, his eyes wandered from Frank's and fixed themselves in space —the gaze becoming deeper, and the expression as of one who reads things far off.

"A day of judgment and lamentation, when even the righteous shall be sifted. Afterwards the good time. A day of gathering of the nations upon the earth. The Great Battle—the Final Battle—shall be fought, after which there shall be no more wars. The Lord's battle will be fought on the Lord's battle-field, the Plain of Esdraelon : the battle of the people against the priests, and all their power. After it, the priests shall clothe themselves with trembling as with a garment. Know," he continued after a pause, stretching his hand across the table, and still with his eyes fixed in vacancy— "know that, from time long gone by, even from the

days of the Chaldæan who first invented the accursed thing, the arm of the Lord has been against the priesthood. There is one nation the enemy of the human race—the nation of the priests. Whether they call themselves Catholic, or Anglican, or Dissenting, or Heathen, the spirit is alike. It is the spirit of darkness and tyranny."

"Mr. Mellishp, is your tea to your liking?" whispered Patty.

"It is the spirit of pride and falsehood. Every dogma that blindfolds men's eyes is the invention of a priest; every accursed form of domination is the invention of the priests; every evil government has been maintained by the priests. They have made the world what it is; they have substituted fear for love; they keep the people ignorant, they darken counsel, and shut out light."

"Joey, run up and fetch my bonnet," said Patty.

"Then you want to abolish all priests?" said Frank, looking with wonder at the religious enthusiast.

"I am on the Lord's side," he replied, simply. "I would that I might live to fight in the Great Battle when it comes, and to fight against the priests. Priests! I am a priest. We are all priests;—every man in his own house, as the Patri-

archs were before us. Remember, young man, that this is no light matter. It will be your place to take a side—and that before long. Russia is advancing south, as Ezekiel prophesied. Turkey is falling to pieces, and will soon be even as she who was once decked with ornaments—with bracelets on her hands and a chain upon her neck—who went astray and was confounded, as Ezekiel prophesied. All things came from Palestine: all things go back to Palestine. They are going to make a railway down the valley of the Euphrates: then they will rebuild the city of Babylon. In the time to come, that shall be the city of wealth and trade —when London will be deserted. The city of the Lord shall then be rebuilt, too: even the city of David, with a Temple which shall have no priests. It shall be the reign of peace. All nations shall come into the Church, and the millenium shall be begun. Even so, O Lord: Thy will be done!"

He folded his hands, as he concluded his speech, in a silent prayer.

"Drink your tea, father," said Patty. "It's getting cold—and it's late, besides."

"Where are we going, Miss Silver?" asked Frank.

"Miss Silver!" Patty laughed merrily. "I never

was called Miss Silver in my life before. Call me Patty, Mr. Melliship."

"I will, if you will call me Frank."

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the kind. You are a gentleman, and don't belong to our rank of life. Hush!—don't move. Don't disturb father. He's often so, after talking about the Bible."

The enthusiast was bent forward, with his eyes fixed, gazing out of the window. He neither heard nor saw—he was in a trance. Frank looked at him anxiously. Then, moved by the impulse of his artistic nature, he took a book from the table. It was Patty's hymn-book—and on the fly-leaf began to sketch her father with his pencil. Patty looked over his shoulder in speechless admiration. In three minutes it was done—a rude, rough sketch, slightly idealized, so as to bring out the noble ruggedness of the man's brow, the wild depth of his eyes, the setting of his lips.

"Oh! it's wonderful," Patty whispered.

"Shall I draw you?" asked Frank, in a whisper. "Sit down, and I will try."

She sat down, blushing; but the next minute sprang up again, whispering—

"Not to-day—not while father is like that. Don't speak."

She took the Bible from him, and looked at the portrait with devouring eyes. Some subtle beauty the artist had put into the lines which she had never noticed before in her father's face, and saw it now for the first time.

They sat for two or three minutes more in silence, and then Mr. Silver threw his head back with a sigh, and looked round the room.

"It is late," he said. "Let us go."

"But where are we going?" asked Frank again.

"Why, to Mr. Eddrup's church, of course."

He followed in astonishment. Who and what was this Mr. Eddrup, that these people should so look up to him?

Patty and he walked together.

"I shall show the picture to father," she said—"but not to-night: not till the fit is off him. I suppose you were surprised to find us in such a nice house? We couldn't afford to rent it, you know; but it's Mr. Leweson's, and he gives it to us for nothing. We sometimes let lodgings, only I don't know—it is such a trouble."

"You had better again," said Frank. "I will be your lodger."

"Ah! I don't know. "I should like it, you know," she replied, simply; "but father's particu-

lar. You might turn out bad, after all. And then see where we should be!"

"Well—I haven't turned out very good, so far," said Frank, with a sigh.

"Here we are at the church," said Patty, stopping at a door.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH.

A STAIRCASE, steep as a ladder, led to a long, low room, filled with people. It might have held about eighty, because audiences of all kinds, whether for religion or amusement, pack closely. The windows were open, because the night was close. The room was lighted by two or three gas-jets, and fitted up with benches for the body of the room, and a foot-high platform for the end. This was garnished with a rough hand-rail, not for any separation of the minister from the people, but for a leaning-place on which he might rest his hands. Two or three chairs were on the platform. One of these was empty. Mr. Silver, leaving Frank in the hands of his daughter, went to the end, and took

the vacant seat with a slight but noticeable air of pride. The only arm-chair was occupied by Mr. Eddrup, who was leaning his head on his hands, motionless.

The people were the common people of the neighbourhood: rough, coarse men, and rough, coarse women. They all knew each other, and occasionally telegraphed salutes with friendly grins. A few carried babies; but there were very few children present, and those only so small as not to be able to take care of themselves. They whispered a good deal to each other, but in a hushed, serious way. Laughter and levity there were none.

The worshippers in this humble Ebenezer were called, as Frank afterwards discovered, the Primitive Blueskins, by the scoffers in the neighbourhood. The reason, as told to him, was a queer story, which may or may not be true. It told how, forty years ago, before Mr. Eddrup went to the place, there had been an attempt—a very little one—to promote in the court some form of Christian worship. This room, the same in which they always met, had been fixed upon as the only room available. It was old and shaky, and it was built over a dyeing establishment. One cold winter night, soon after they had formed themselves into

a congregation, the reverend gentleman who conducted their exercises, whether driven by religious zeal or impelled by the severity of the weather, enforced his arguments by an unwonted physical activity, stamping, gesticulating, and even jumping. He calculated, *nimium credulus;* on the strength of the floor. Alas! it gave way. The boards broke beneath the unaccustomed strain. The table, on which were two candles, was upset; and, amid the darkness, the little flock could hear only the groans of their pastor and the splashing of liquid. The last flash of the overturning lights had shown him vanishing through the flooring. They turned and fled. It was some time before they ventured to return. But they found their minister blue. He was dyed: he had fallen into the vat prepared for an indigo day. Besides this, he was half frozen. After this the congregation dispersed. Nor was it till Mr. Eddrup came that they reassembled; and when they did, the nickname stuck to them still.

Patty pulled Frank by the arm, and they humbly took the lowest places of all, the very last, with their backs against the wall.

"It's going to begin directly," whispered the girl. "You must look over my hymn book. There's Mr. Eddrup."

As she spoke, the old man rose and advanced to the front of the platform, grasping the rail.

"If any have aught to say"—he spoke a kind of formula—"let him or her now say it."

A labouring man rose up, and incoherently delivered himself of a few short and unconnected sentences. Then he sat down, perspiring. He had an idea which he wanted to set forth, but language was too strong for him, and he had failed.

Mr. Eddrup looked round again. No one else spoke. Then he took a hymn book, and gave out a number. They took their hymns, like their tea, sitting; but sang with none the less fervour.

Then their leader—for such Mr. Eddrup was—rose to address them, with his hands on the rail, his head held down, and his white hair falling forward in a long mass that almost hid his face.

"Into what queer world have I dropped?" thought Frank. "A religious trapeze family; a man who lives at Skimp's, and preaches to people; I myself, who sing at a music hall, and come here on Sundays. It all seems very irregular."

Mr. Eddrup, still looking on the ground, with his long, white hair hanging about him, began his discourse in a slow, hesitating way, as if he was

feeling, not for ideas, but for fitting words to put them in. Presently he warmed a little with his subject, and lifting his head, spoke in clearer and fuller tones. His audience went with him, devouring every word he said. They were wise words. He spoke of the everyday life of a religious man, of the temptations that beset the poor, of the strength which comes of resistance. He had that native eloquence which comes of earnestness. He wished to say the right thing in the most forcible way. So, when he had found the right thing, he took the simplest words that lay to his hand, and the readiest illustration. Socrates did the same. A higher than Socrates did the same. He talked to them for two hours. During all that time, not a soul stirred. All eyes were fixed upon the speaker. There was no interruption, save now and again when a woman sobbed. It was not that he told them the hackneyed things that preachers love to dwell upon—the general phrases, the emotional doctrines; all these Mr. Eddrup passed by. He told them unpalatable things: little things: things which are a perpetual hindrance to the progress of the soul, which yet seem to have nothing to do with the soul. He laid down directions for them which showed that he knew exactly all their cir-

cumstances. He showed them how religion is a flower that grows upon all soils alike, nourished by the same sun which shines upon rich and poor. And, lastly—in a peroration which made the ears of those that heard to tingle—he proclaimed the infinite love of the Creator. He stopped suddenly, sat down, and was silent.

They sang a hymn, and the people went away.

"Tell me the meaning of it," asked Frank of Patty. "Who and what is Mr. Eddrup?"

"Come away, and I will tell you. Father likes to have a chat with him of a Sunday night. Come, Joey. He came here," said Patty, "forty years ago and more. He was a young man, I've been told, and strong; but he was always very sad and silent. He began by searching out—always in this court—the poor children, and getting them to school in the morning. He taught it himself, and gave them bread and tea for breakfast. People liked that, you know, and the children liked it. Then he got to having the men to evening school at eight o'clock. A few of them went. The court was the most awful place, I've been told, in all London. Mr. Eddrup was robbed a dozen times going away at night—beaten, too, and ill-treated. But he always came again next day, just as if

nothing had happened. They do say that nothing would make him prosecute a thief. So when the boys found there was no danger and no fun in stealing his handkerchief or knocking him down, of course they left off. Well, so it went on, you see. Gradually, the court got better. Mr. Eddrup got the houses into his own hands by degrees—because he's a very well-to-do man, you know—and made them clean. They were pigsties before. He never turned anybody out; never sold up their sticks for rent; always waited and waited—and, they say, he always gets paid."

"Has he turned the people into angels, then?"

"No. I don't say that. But they're better than the run of people. He has made them a religious lot which was the most dreadful lot in all London. Parsons come here now, and want the people to go to church. Not they. So long as Mr. Eddrup preaches in the little chapel, there they go."

"All this must cost him money as well as time."

"He spends all he's got, whatever that may be, Mr. Melliship, on the poor. I've been told that he never takes anything stronger than water, and has only one room to himself, all to have more for the poor people."

"Some of that is true, I know," said Frank.

"Oh! those flowers," cried Patty as they passed a flower girl. "How sweet they smell!"

"Let me give you some," said Frank.

Now, Patty had never had any flowers given her before. It was a new sensation that a man—or anybody, indeed—should pay her attentions. She went home with her present, and put the flowers in water. If Frank had been able to see how carefully those poor flowers were watered, and how long they lasted! It will be understood at once that Patty's stage career had been very different to that of most young ladies of her profession. Always with her father, taken by him to the theatre, brought home by him, she was as domestic a little bird as any in all this great wilderness of houses.

"Poor Patty!" thought Frank as he walked home. "A dreary life for her to risk her life every night for so many shillings or pounds a-week; to have no lovers, like other girls; no pleasure but to go and hear Mr. Eddrup preach."

Mr. Eddrup had returned when he reached home, and was sitting, silent as usual, in the drawing-room with Captain Bowker—who had his long pipe alight, and his glass of rum and water before him.

"You were there to-night," said the old preacher. "The Silvers brought you."

"They did," said Frank. "Thank you very much."

Captain Bowker smoked on. He was in a meditative mood.

"I went once," he said, "myself. Should have gone again, but I saw one of my last old crew there. Couldn't go and sit on the same bench with him, you know. Stations must be observed. Mr. Melliship, it's just as well to say that Mr. Eddrup here doesn't care to have his Sunday evening's occupation known."

"Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame," said Frank.

"No, Mr. Melliship—no," replied the old man, sadly. "There has never been a time when I have not been beset by temptation to be proud of a trifling piece of work like mine. I should like to be famous, if only in the smallest way. But I pray against it. I formed the resolution very long ago, that there was only one course for me in life—to go through it as noiselessly as I could, to do as little mischief as possible, to resent no injury."

"But why?" asked Frank. "Why?"

"Some day I will tell you, perhaps. Not now.

I am glad you came to hear me talk to my people, Mr. Melliship. It is a long time since we have had a—anybody but my own people. It does them good to see strangers. Let me look at your face, sir."

Frank held his face, smiling, to the light, while the old man walked feebly—Frank noticed how very feeble he was after his exertions in the chapel—to the chair where he sat, and looked at him steadily.

"There is the seal of innocence, and the seal of guilt. This is the seal of innocence. Keep it, young man. Look at mine. Do you see nothing?"

"Nothing," said Frank.

Mr. Eddrup sighed, and sat down again. A few minutes afterwards he stole out of the room, and slipped upstairs to bed.

"He's often like that," said Captain Bowker. "Something on his mind. I had a cook aboard the *Merry Moonshine* once, used to sit all day long, and never speak to a soul. Took a fancy to a Lascar, and would sometimes talk to him. No one else, mind. One day he up with the chopper, and buried it three inches in the Lascar's head. Then, before you could say Jack Robinson, over he went

—ship going ten knots. Lascar dead in a minute. *Mr. Eddrup's took a fancy to you!*"

"That's a cheerful sort of story to tell. Do you think Mr. Eddrup may be tempted to do something rash with the carving knife?"

"I can't say," said the Captain, solemnly. "No one can say what another man will do, or what terrible thing may happen to him. I've been married myself."

"Then you may be married again."

"Lord forbid! There's ghosts again. I suppose you never saw a ghost?"

"Never."

"Nor more did I. But I've *felt* one, young man. I've been beat black and blue by a ghost. Rum thing, that was."

"Tell it me."

"There it is, you see. You get making me sit up spinning my yarns when I ought to be in my berth. Sunday night, too. Well, I'll tell you this one. It was forty years ago. I was a midshipman aboard an East Indiaman. We'd had bad weather, and put into Port Louis to refit;—for the matter of that, we always put in there in the good old days. I was ashore with two or three more, drinking, as boys will, in the verandah of an hotel there. There was

a chap, an Englishman, with a solemn face and a long nose, got talking to us. I remember his hatchet jaws now. Presently he whispers across the little table—

"'I want two or three plucky fellows. Will you come?'

"'What for?' we asked him.

"'Money,' says he. 'Treasure.'

"'Do you know where it is?' I said.

"'I do,' says he.

"'Then why don't you get it yourself?' says I.

"That seemed to fix him a bit. Then he says—

"'Because I can't do it alone, and I won't trust anybody but English sailors. It's money buried by the pirates up in the hillside over there. I know the exact spot. There is a story going about that the place is haunted; but we aint afraid of ghosts, I *should* hope.'

"We agreed for next night, if we could get leave, and went aboard again. All that day and the next we were talking it over. The mate heard us. He came up to me laughing—

"'So you're not afraid of ghosts, are you?'

"However, we got our leave, and went ashore. The mate went too.

"It's dark in those latitudes between six and seven,

and at that time we met our long-nosed friend. He had got pickaxes and a lantern, and led the way. There were four of us altogether. We had to pick our way, when we left the path, over stones and and through bushes; and, what was very odd, I kept on thinking I heard steps behind us. Being only a slip of a boy, I begins to get nervous. Presently our guide stopped.

"'Here we are,' he says; and, pointing to a place under a tree, he hangs up the lantern, and takes off his coat and began to dig. 'Now boys,' he says, 'as quick as you can.'

"We fell to with a will. It was a precious hot night, and the ground was hard; but we made a hole in it after a bit, and then at it tooth and nail. Five minutes after we began, I looked up to straighten my back, and found the lantern gone.

"'Who's unshipped the light?' I says.

"We all looked round. There was a young moon to give us a little light, but no lantern. I, for one, felt queer. However, we all went on again without saying a word. We got a hole two foot deep, and were all in it. Then one of my mates wants to know how long the job's going to last.

"'Perhaps,' he says, 'the ghosts have sunk it fifty fathoms deep.'

"'Ghosts be d——d,' said lantern jaws. 'Dig away, boys.'

"Then we heard a laugh close by us.

"'Ho!—ho!—ho!'

"It was a curious place for echoes among the rocks, and the laugh went ringing round and round till you thought it was never going to stop. We all stopped for a bit.

"'Go on,' says our leader. 'They can't do more than laugh.'

"With that another laugh, louder than the first. However, we went on. Then I heard steps; and looking up, I saw three or four figures over the hole.

"'Lord!' I cried. 'Here's the ghosts.'

"Well, I hadn't hardly time to sing out, when whack, whack came half a dozen sticks on our heads and backs, and we all tumbled together. I suppose the sticks went at us for five minutes in all. When they stopped, I got up the first, grabbed my jacket, hanging on the tree, and legged it, tumbling over the rocks, and scratching myself in the bushes, as fast as ever mortal man ran in his life. The rest all came after me. What became of mealy face, I don't know. P'raps the ghosts finished him off.

"Half an hour after we got to the port, the mate came up with three friends. They were all laughing at some joke of theirs.

"'Well, my lads,' says he, 'did you see any ghosts?'

"No one answered, and they all laughed louder.

"The oddest thing of all, Mr. Melliship," concluded Captain Bowker, laying his pipe-stem impressively on Frank's hand, "was that next morning my cap, which I had left behind in the hole, was found in the boat. Now, *how did that get there?*"

CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH.

A WORD about Parkside, where Grace Heathcote sat waiting and hoping. It is the way of things. A man works and hopes, and is sure to be disappointed. A woman waits and hopes, generally getting disappointed too.

Dull enough it was, and quiet, unless when Cousin Dick was with them. The Heathcote girls were —by right of education—not of position—something better than the commonplace young ladies of the quiet market town. They saw little of them, and made few friends. Moreover, they were five miles away from Market Basing, so that they were practically thrown upon their own resources. That meant that they talked, and made each other un-

happy. This, I believe, is not uncommon in English households—that sweet domesticity on which we pride ourselves covering an infinite amount of petty miseries, tiny bullyings, naggings, and prickings with tongues as sharp as needles. Sister against sister—mother against daughter. They love each other fondly, of course, because they are always supposed to love each other: domestic affection being as necessary in modern life as a shirt to one's back. Unfortunately, the love which reigns in the dear home life does not always bring with it that tenderness for each other's sensitive points which keeps out of the house ill-humours and sour tempers. The lower classes of England—I do not mean the very lowest—are much superior to the middle classes in this respect. I have found out the reason why. They don't sit at home so much. In London, they are always going to the theatre, which is almost the only amusement for the class who frequent the pit, and are not above the gallery. In the country, they go out and about as much as they can.

Now, Grace Heathcote had a large share not only of fidelity, but of obstinacy, which she inherited from her father. A woman's fidelity is very often like one of those plants which flourish

best covered up and hidden. Grace's prospered best openly—in the sunshine—and was able to grow and flourish even against the east winds of her mother's opposition. To her, Frank was a hero. It seemed noble in him to go away into a sort of hiding—working, as she imagined, to pay off his father's liabilities, and hoping to come back after many months to claim her promised hand. This she thought, and this she said when, as happened not infrequently, her mother turned the talk upon Frank.

To Lydia Heathcote, Frank seemed as a fool. And she said so. For she was determined on one thing: her daughter should marry Dick Mortiboy. She saw that Grace attracted him. She was sure—for she meant well by her daughter—that he would make a good husband. She wanted to secure all that money of his for her own children. She was wise as well as determined. She knew that as the constant dropping of water wears away the hardest rock, so the constant insinuations of distrust and suspicion wear away the fondest woman's trust. Therefore she talked a good deal about Frank; repeated and reiterated her grief that he was doing so badly, as she assumed; pointed out how foolish it was to go away from his friends, and those who

would help him to a decent position; hinted that it would be so much better if he were to emigrate, and follow the example of his cousin Dick; never failed to shed tears over the enumeration of dear Dick's many virtues, as contrasted with the failings and weaknesses of Frank; and always ended by reproachfully sighing over her daughter, as over one who trifles with a good man's love.

"But, mamma, Frank will get on, I'm sure. Kate said in her letter she knew he was doing well. He is very clever. He can paint beautifully; and it was only the other evening, at the rectory, that Mr. Nelson said artists were just as well off as any other professional men, and as well thought of. If he likes painting better than anything else, and sees his way to get on, why should he not be an artist?"

"Nonsense, child," was her mother's answer to Grace's special pleading. And then Mrs. Heathcote explained, for the hundredth time, the reasons why Frank could never, by any possibility, be in a position to marry. "Besides, if Kate knows he is doing very well in London, it is a strange thing they don't know where he lives. You know, your father would write to him if he knew where to find him. But we couldn't even give Dick his address

before he went to town. Such a want of respectability about having no address! It's no use, Grace; I know perfectly well that the boy is doing no good for himself, else why not let his friends know his address?"

"I am not going to listen," said Grace, indignantly, "to things like that. You have no right to say such things of Frank."

"There—there, Grace, do be reasonable. It is all for your own good that I speak. If your own mother does not know the world, who should? Why, before I married your father, there were two or three people I fancied. Young Spriggs, the brewer, who failed for thirty thousand pounds, and cut his throat—I might have had him. Mr. Potterton, of Wyncote—he's got an asthma now: you can hear him a mile off, poor man. And old Mr. Humbledum, who died of drink last week—why, people used to talk about us. That was before I met your father. And look at Dick—poor Dick!—head over ears in love with you."

"To begin with, he is nothing of the sort. And if he were, it would be nothing to me."

"I can see it, girl," said Mrs. Heathcote, wisely nodding her head. "I've seen it for months now. I think it is—I suppose it doesn't matter what I

think—cruel of you never to give him the slightest civility. Poor fellow, you might be even polite to him when he comes."

Grace beat a tattoo on the carpet with her foot, but said nothing.

"I only hope he does not notice it so much as I do. I've no patience with your father; he's as easy as an old shoe about things. If he'd told you to give Frank up when they left—"

"Mamma!" cried Grace, her cheek reddening and her eye flashing brightly. Mrs. Heathcote was a little afraid of her daughter when she looked like that. She saw she had gone a little too far—not for the first time. "Mamma, how dare you ——"

The door opened and Mr. Heathcote came into the room. Grace fell into his arms, and, with her head on his shoulder, sobbed like a child. She would not have broken out if they had remained alone.

"Lydia," said Mr. Heathcote angrily, "what have you been saying to Grace? Never mind, my child—never mind."

"Really, John," said his wife, "you and Grace together are enough to wear out the patience of Job," and she swept out of the room.

And so on. Scenes that happened not once, but

often. And with each one Grace became obstinate, and her mother more irritating. Lucy was made unhappy. The farmer was made unhappy: that was nothing. Civil war raged in Parkside Farm, and the contest was maintained on terms of perfect equality, in which Grace, shielded by a stubborn resolution, received all her mother's blows, and only occasionally retaliated with words which had more of sharpness than of filial piety. Dick brought peace for the time, and there was renewed war when he was gone.

A truce was held on a tacit understanding, while Mrs. Heathcote tried to play off Lucy on Dick. This was, however, quite hopeless. First, Dick did not like women to be gentle and soft. He liked a girl with a fine high temper of her own, and a will, like Grace; and, secondly, Lucy did not like Dick so much as Grace did. From her constant visits to old Ready-money, she found out, by the old man's frowns when Dick came to see him, that there was something he had done. Of course, she knew nothing positive; but she had strong suspicions that all was not quite right between the father and the son. Her frequent absences in Derngate made matters even worse for Grace.

As for moving Farmer John out of his jog-trot

ways, nothing could do that. He was quite ready to help Frank with money or counsel—for the Heathcotes were very well to do ; but he was not going to put himself out of the way, and hunt him up. Let Frank come to him. Frank did not go to him : made no sign : and Grace's heart began to fail her.

Village affairs lost their interest. The rheumatics of the old women found her callous : their complaints fell on cold ears. She went through the daily routine of her small duties without interest. When her mother, the day's business finished, about ten or eleven—they breakfasted at eight—took her seat for the day, she tried to escape to her own room, or to the garden. She could sometimes—when Silly Billy could be spared to blow the organ—take refuge in the church. Her mother disliked music in the morning, so she could not play. Her pony was lame, and she could not ride. Mrs. Heathcote never drove out, except to town : like most country ladies, thinking very little of the lovely foliage and shady lanes of her own shire.

Sometimes one of the Battiscombe girls stayed with them—then they played croquet in the afternoon ; Lord Launton very often finding something to say to Mr. Heathcote, which made it quite

natural for him to stop and play with them till the dressing-bell rang at the Towers. It was curious that he found business which brought him to Park-side three or four times a-week. He came in on any pretext, always about the same time — croquet time; stayed as long as he could, and almost forgot his shyness. Dick Mortiboy at first made him shrink into his shell; but he managed to creep out again gradually, and came to like him. Dick took a fancy to the shy young fellow; talked to him; told him stories—Dick always had the readiest perception of what kind of story would suit his listener: this was one great secret of his popularity—and pleased the viscount by not deferring to him in the slightest degree because he was a lord.

So life went on:—Grace sad and unhappy; her mother angry and disappointed; all playing at cross-purposes—as we always do; all acting a part to the world—as we always do; all putting a good face on things—as of course we must. And do not quarrel with Grace when you read her letters to Kate, because they seem bright and happy. I knew a man once who wrote the brightest, gayest, happiest letter—full of mirth, and fun, and good

spirits—a quarter of an hour before he blew out his brains. Letters mean nothing, except that they are sometimes a natural relief to the heart, and the effort of pleasing a friend gives you good spirits in spite of yourself.

END OF VOL. II.

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